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THE NEW MUTANTS STARS
THE COSMIC CANNONBALL CAPER
WITH JUST A THOUGHT, SAM GUTHRIE CAN TRIGGER A BIOTHERMIC REACTION CAPABLE OF HURTLING HIM THROUGH THE AIR--OR ANYTHING UNLUCKY ENOUGH TO BE IN HIS WAY--LIKE A RUNAWAY CANNONBALL.
HE'S A MUTANT, YOU SEE, BORN WITH THIS UNIQUE ABILITY THAT WILL FOREVER SET HIM APART FROM THE REST OF HUMANITY. UNCONTROLLED, HIS POWER IS A DEADLY DANGER--BOTH TO HIM AND ANYONE AROUND HIM--WHICH IS WHY HE'S CURRENTLY A STUDENT AT PROFESSOR CHARLES XAVIER'S SCHOOL FOR GIFTED YOUNGSTERS.
THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE NEW MUTANTS, SAM IS LEARNING HOW TO COPE WITH WHO AND WHAT HE IS--AND, PERHAPS, TURN A POTENTIAL CURSE INTO A GIFT.
UNFORTUNATELY, AS WITH EVERY SCHOOL, THERE ARE TESTS TO BE TAKEN.

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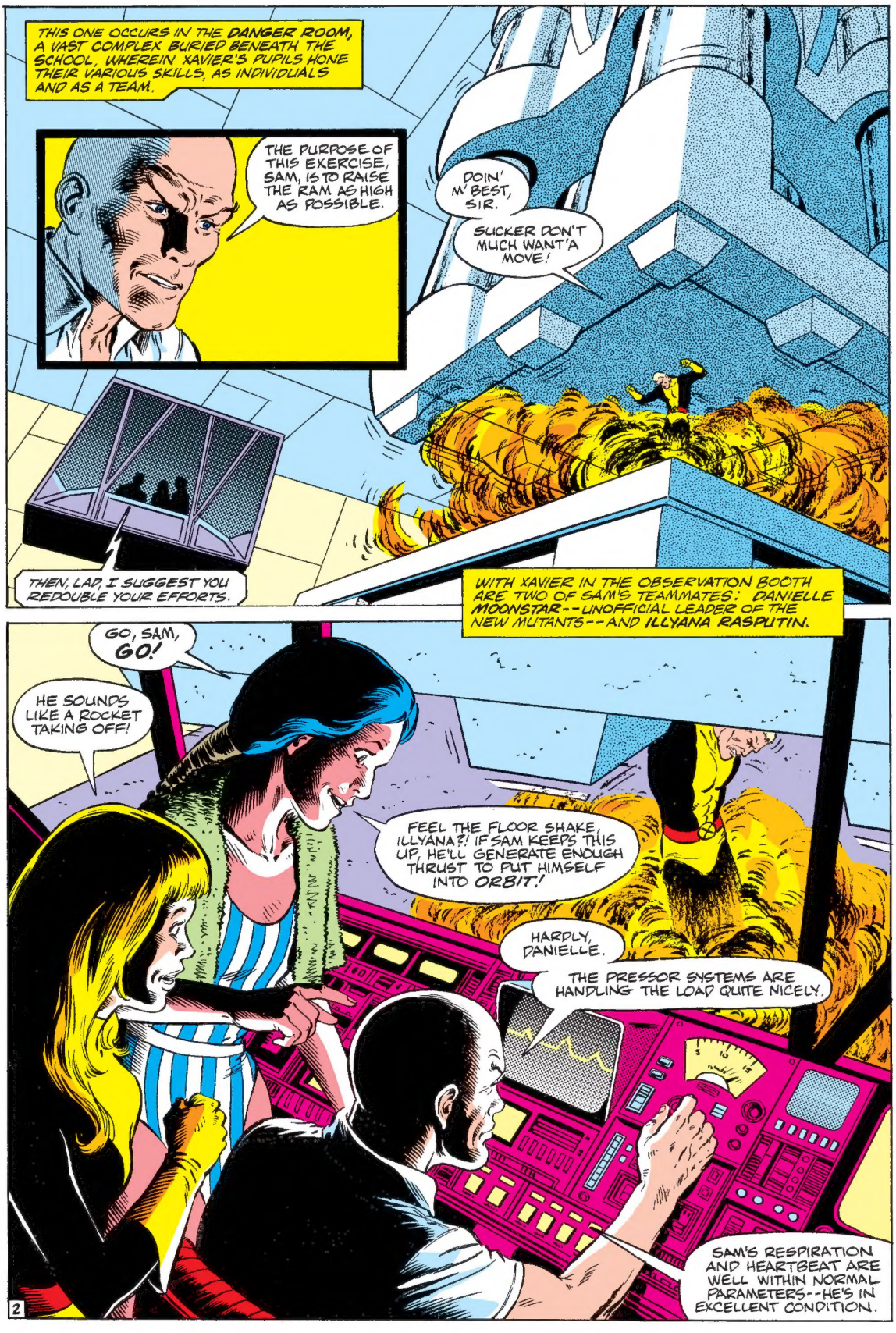
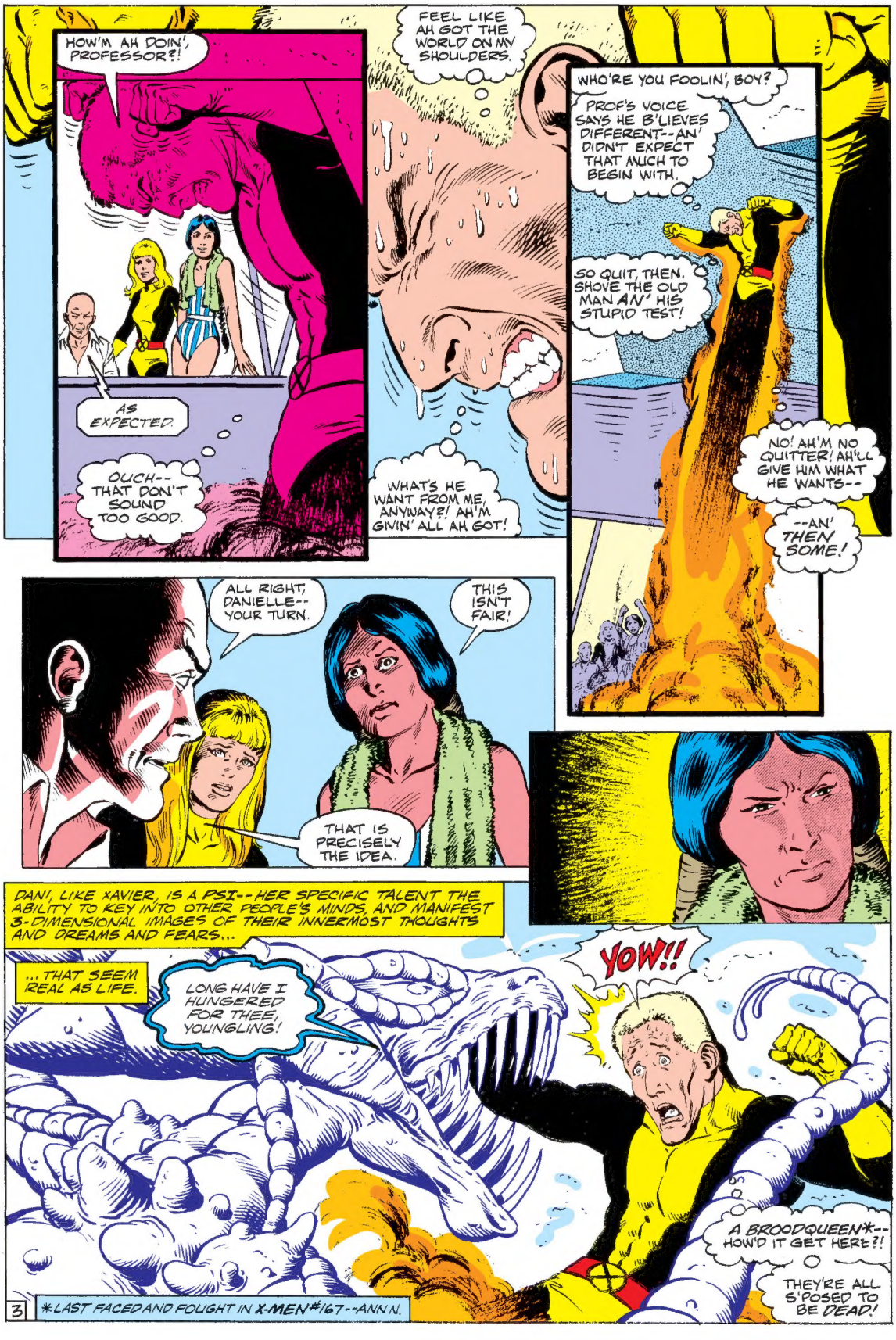

THIS ONE OCCURS IN THE DANGER ROOM, A VAST COMPLEX BURIED BENEATH THE SCHOOL, WHEREIN XAVIER'S PUPILS HONE THEIR VARIOUS SKILLS, AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A TEAM.
THE PURPOSE OF THIS EXERCISE, SAM, IS TO RAISE THE RAM AS HIGH AS POSSIBLE.
DOIN' M' BEST, SIR.
SUCKER DON'T MUCH WANT'A MOVE!
THEN, LAD, I SUGGEST YOU REDOUBLE YOUR EFFORTS.
WITH XAVIER IN THE OBSERVATION BOOTH ARE TWO OF SAM'S TEAMMATES: DANIELLE MOONSTAR--UNOFFICIAL LEADER OF THE NEW MUTANTS--AND ILLYANA RASPUTIN.
GO, SAM, GO!
HE SOUNDS LIKE A ROCKET TAKING OFF!
FEEL THE FLOOR SHAKE, ILLYANA?! IF SAM KEEPS THIS UP, HE'LL GENERATE ENOUGH THRUST TO PUT HIMSELF INTO ORBIT!
HARDLY, DANIELLE.
THE PRESSOR SYSTEMS ARE HANDLING THE LOAD QUITE NICELY.
SAM'S RESPIRATION AND HEARTBEAT ARE WELL WITHIN NORMAL PARAMETERS--HE'S IN EXCELLENT CONDITION.


HOW'M AH DOIN', PROFESSOR?!
AS EXPECTED.
OUCH-- THAT DON'T SOUND TOO GOOD.
FEEL LIKE AH GOT THE WORLD ON MY SHOULDERS.
WHAT'S HE WANT FROM ME, ANYWAY?! AH'M GIVIN' ALL AH GOT!
WHO'RE YOU FOOLIN', BOY?
PROF'S VOICE SAYS HE B'LIEVES DIFFERENT--AN' DIDN'T EXPECT THAT MUCH TO BEGIN WITH.
SO QUIT, THEN. SHOVE THE OLD MAN AN' HIS STUPID TEST!
NO! AH'M NO QUITTER! AH'LL GIVE HIM WHAT HE WANTS--
--AN' THEN SOME!
ALL RIGHT, DANIELLE-- YOUR TURN.
THIS ISN'T FAIR!
THAT IS PRECISELY THE IDEA.
DANI, LIKE XAVIER, IS A PSI--HER SPECIFIC TALENT THE ABILITY TO KEY INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S MINDS, AND MANIFEST 3-DIMENSIONAL IMAGES OF THEIR INNERMOST THOUGHTS AND DREAMS AND FEARS...
... THAT SEEM REAL AS LIFE.
LONG HAVE I HUNGERED FOR THEE, YOUNGLING!
YOW!!
A BROODQUEEN*-- HOW'D IT GET HERE?!
THEY'RE ALL S'POSED TO BE DEAD!
*LAST FACED AND FOUGHT IN X-MEN #167--ANN N.
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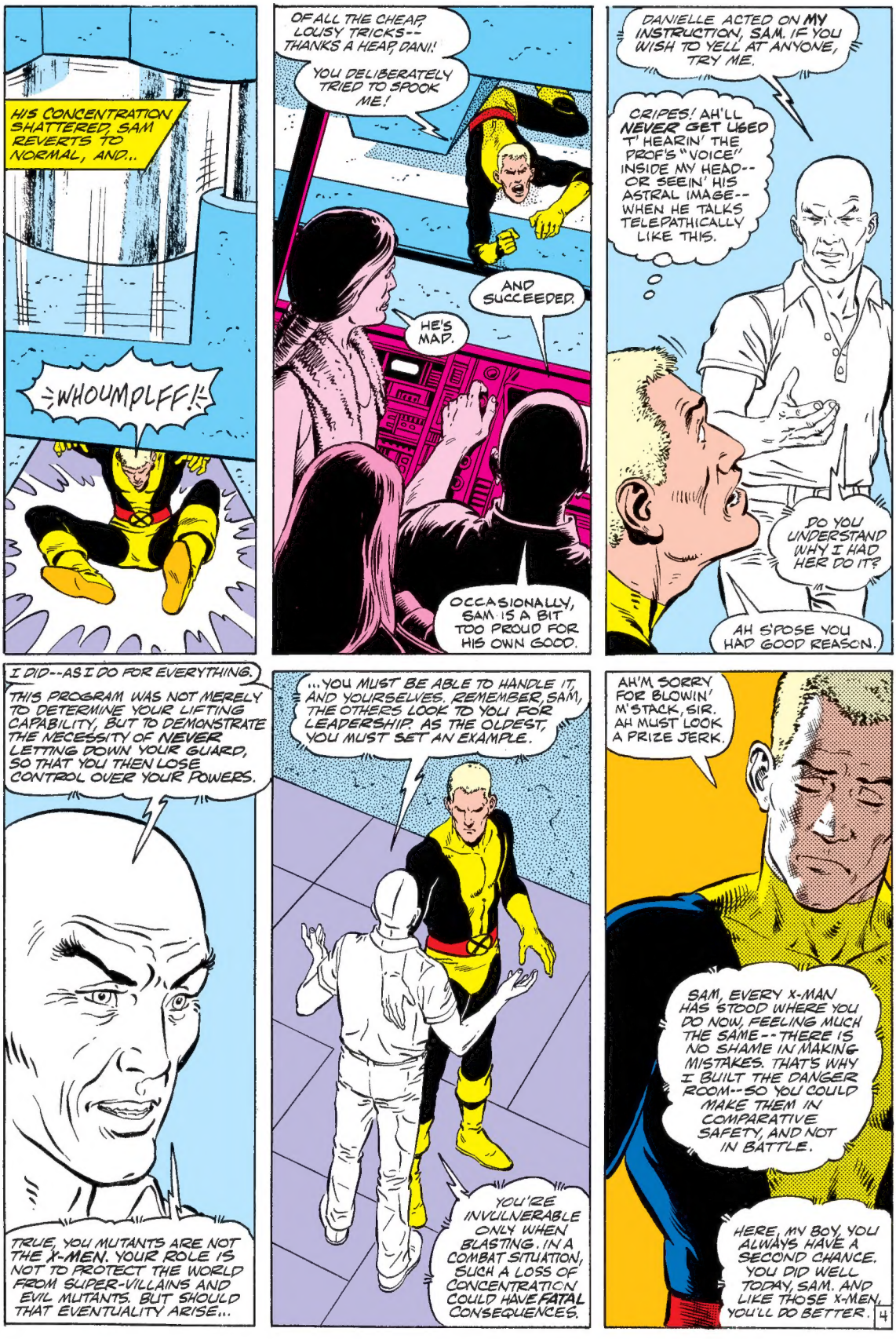
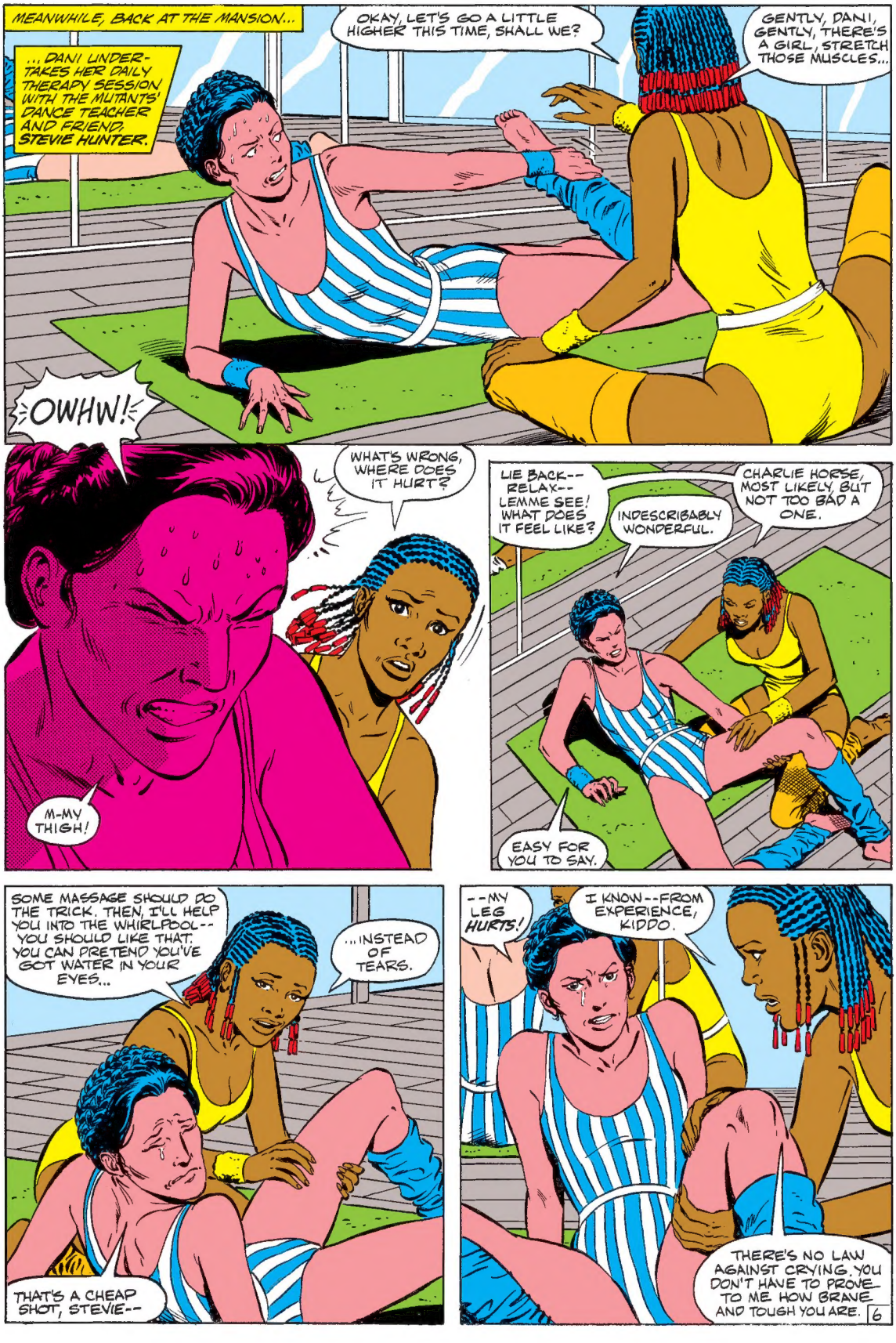

HIS CONCENTRATION SHATTERED, SAM REVERTS TO NORMAL, AND...
WHOUMPLFF!
OF ALL THE CHEAP, LOUSY TRICKS-- THANKS A HEAP, DANI!
YOU DELIBERATELY TRIED TO SPOOK ME!
AND SUCCEEDED.
HE'S MAD.
OCCASIONALLY, SAM IS A BIT TOO PROUD FOR HIS OWN GOOD.
DANIELLE ACTED ON MY INSTRUCTION, SAM. IF YOU WISH TO YELL AT ANYONE, TRY ME.
CRIPES! AH'LL NEVER GET USED T' HEARIN' THE PROF'S "VOICE" INSIDE MY HEAD-- OR SEEIN' HIS ASTRAL IMAGE-- WHEN HE TALKS TELEPATHICALLY LIKE THIS.
DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHY I HAD HER DO IT?
AH S'POSE YOU HAD GOOD REASON.
I DID--AS I DO FOR EVERYTHING.
THIS PROGRAM WAS NOT MERELY TO DETERMINE YOUR LIFTING CAPABILITY, BUT TO DEMONSTRATE THE NECESSITY OF NEVER LETTING DOWN YOUR GUARD, SO THAT YOU THEN LOSE CONTROL OVER YOUR POWERS.
TRUE, YOU MUTANTS ARE NOT THE X-MEN. YOUR ROLE IS NOT TO PROTECT THE WORLD FROM SUPER-VILLAINS AND EVIL MUTANTS. BUT SHOULD THAT EVENTUALITY ARISE...
...YOU MUST BE ABLE TO HANDLE IT, AND YOURSELVES. REMEMBER, SAM, THE OTHERS LOOK TO YOU FOR LEADERSHIP. AS THE OLDEST, YOU MUST SET AN EXAMPLE.
YOU'RE INVULNERABLE ONLY WHEN BLASTING. IN A COMBAT SITUATION, SUCH A LOSS OF CONCENTRATION COULD HAVE FATAL CONSEQUENCES.
AH'M SORRY FOR BLOWIN' M'STACK, SIR. AH MUST LOOK A PRIZE JERK.
SAM, EVERY X-MAN HAS STOOD WHERE YOU DO NOW, FEELING MUCH THE SAME--THERE IS NO SHAME IN MAKING MISTAKES. THAT'S WHY I BUILT THE DANGER ROOM--SO YOU COULD MAKE THEM IN COMPARATIVE SAFETY, AND NOT IN BATTLE.
HERE, MY BOY, YOU ALWAYS HAVE A SECOND CHANCE. YOU DID WELL TODAY, SAM. AND LIKE THOSE X-MEN, YOU'LL DO BETTER.

NEW YORK CITY.
VVVV


MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE MANSION...
...DANI UNDERTAKES HER DAILY THERAPY SESSION WITH THE MUTANTS' DANCE TEACHER AND FRIEND, STEVIE HUNTER.
OKAY, LET'S GO A LITTLE HIGHER THIS TIME, SHALL WE?
GENTLY, DANI, GENTLY, THERE'S A GIRL, STRETCH THOSE MUSCLES...
OWHW!
WHAT'S WRONG, WHERE DOES IT HURT?
M-MY THIGH!
LIE BACK-- RELAX-- LEMME SEE! WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?
INDESCRIBABLY WONDERFUL.
CHARLIE HORSE, MOST LIKELY, BUT NOT TOO BAD A ONE.
EASY FOR YOU TO SAY.
SOME MASSAGE SHOULD DO THE TRICK. THEN, I'LL HELP YOU INTO THE WHIRLPOOL-- YOU SHOULD LIKE THAT. YOU CAN PRETEND YOU'VE GOT WATER IN YOUR EYES...
...INSTEAD OF TEARS.
THAT'S A CHEAP SHOT, STEVIE--
--MY LEG HURTS!
I KNOW--FROM EXPERIENCE, KIDDO.
THERE'S NO LAW AGAINST CRYING. YOU DON'T HAVE TO PROVE TO ME HOW BRAVE AND TOUGH YOU ARE.
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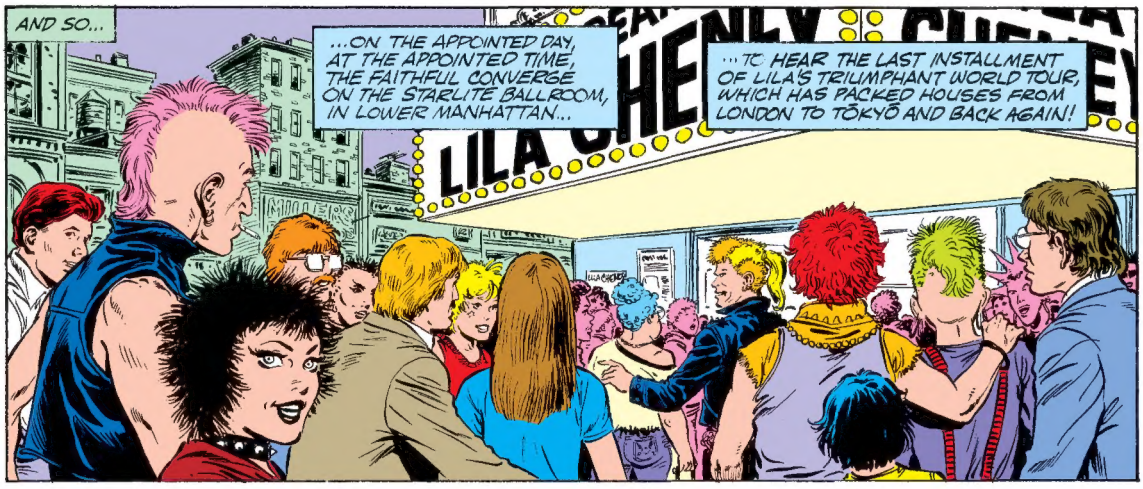
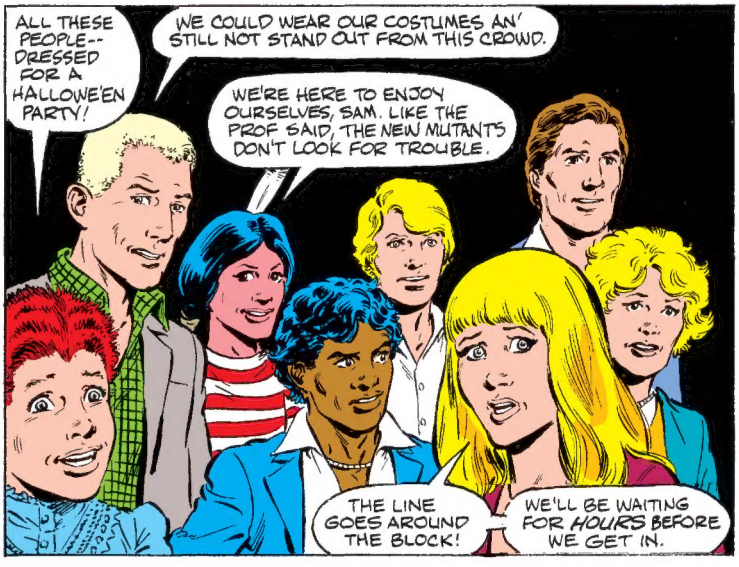
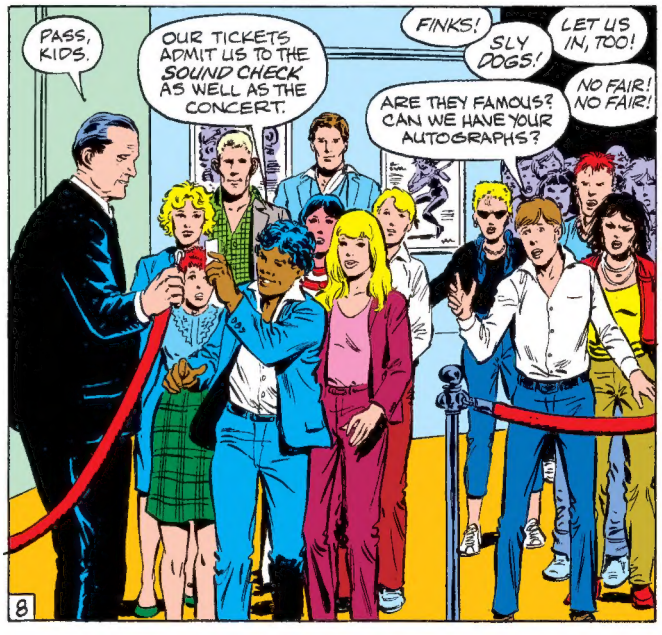
WHY IS IT TAKING SO LONG TO GET BETTER? I HATE THIS!
YOU'RE LUCKY TO BE ALIVE, GIRL!
I KNOW, STEVIE, BUT SOMETIMES IT'S SO HARD!
IT WAS FOR ME, TOO, WHEN I WAS RECOVERING FROM MY BROKEN KNEE.
HOW'D YOU STAND IT?
I SCREAMED A LOT, I CURSED, I BROKE THINGS, I CRIED-- MOSTLY, I ADMIT, WHEN I WAS ALONE-- I BECAME A REAL BEAST.
I TESTED MY FRIENDSHIPS TO THE LIMIT, AND DISCOVERED WHO I COULD TRULY COUNT ON.
BUT WITH THEIR HELP, I FOUGHT. I GOT WELL. YOU MUSTN'T BOTTLE UP YOUR EMOTIONS, DANI--YOU HAVE TO GIVE THEM RELEASE, SOMEHOW, OR YOU'LL TEAR YOURSELF APART INSIDE.
TAKE THINGS ONE DAY, ONE STEP-- ONE MIRACLE-- AT A TIME.
WHAT'S THAT YELLING-- WHO'S THERE?!
ROBERTO!?!
DANI, I GOT 'EM!
TICKETS FOR ALL OF US, TO LILA CHENEY'S FINAL CONCERT, SATURDAY NIGHT-- I GOT 'EM!!


AND SO...
...ON THE APPOINTED DAY, AT THE APPOINTED TIME, THE FAITHFUL CONVERGE ON THE STARLITE BALLROOM, IN LOWER MANHATTAN...
...TO HEAR THE LAST INSTALLMENT OF LILA'S TRIUMPHANT WORLD TOUR, WHICH HAS PACKED HOUSES FROM LONDON TO TŌKYŌ AND BACK AGAIN!


ALL THESE PEOPLE-- DRESSED FOR A HALLOWE'EN PARTY!
WE COULD WEAR OUR COSTUMES AN' STILL NOT STAND OUT FROM THIS CROWD.
WE'RE HERE TO ENJOY OURSELVES, SAM. LIKE THE PROF SAID, THE NEW MUTANTS DON'T LOOK FOR TROUBLE.
THE LINE GOES AROUND THE BLOCK!
WE'LL BE WAITING FOR HOURS BEFORE WE GET IN.

NO, WE WON'T, ILLYANA, MY DARLING...
FOLLOW ME, PEOPLE.


PASS, KIDS.
OUR TICKETS ADMIT US TO THE SOUND CHECK AS WELL AS THE CONCERT.
FINKS!
SLY DOGS!
LET US IN, TOO!
ARE THEY FAMOUS? CAN WE HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPHS?
NO FAIR! NO FAIR!
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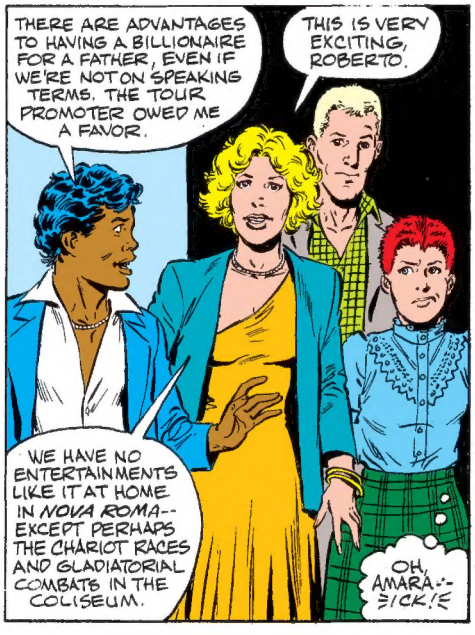
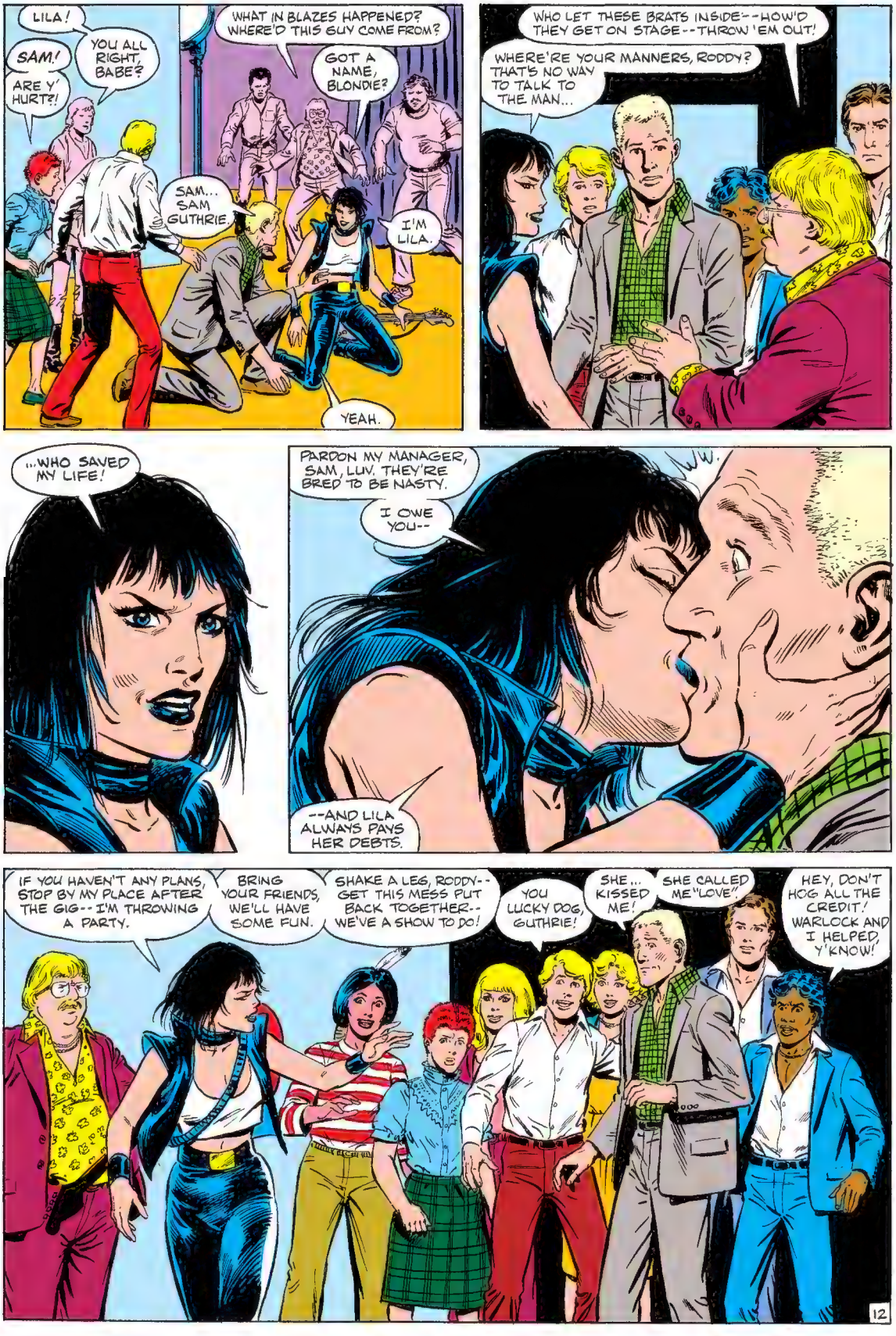

THERE ARE ADVANTAGES TO HAVING A BILLIONAIRE FOR A FATHER, EVEN IF WE'RE NOT ON SPEAKING TERMS. THE TOUR PROMOTER OWED ME A FAVOR.
THIS IS VERY EXCITING, ROBERTO.
WE HAVE NO ENTERTAINMENTS LIKE IT AT HOME IN NOVA ROMA-- EXCEPT PERHAPS THE CHARIOT RACES AND GLADIATORIAL COMBATS IN THE COLISEUM.
OH, AMARA... SICK!E

WHERE'RE WE S'POSED TO SIT, BOBBY?
WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF TIME FOR THAT, SAM--LOOK, THERE'S THE BAND!
I REALLY LIKE BEN LOCKLIN, THE BASS PLAYER.
DANI, HE'S GORGEOUS!
LEAD GUITARIST'S CONAL DURÁN, AN' TH' DRUMMER'S PHIL HOVANNES.
TESTING...TESTING... "THE STARS...SHINE UP... THROUGH HADES!" ♪♫
TOO MUCH VIBRATO IN THE MID-RANGE, REG. CAN YOU CLEAR IT UP, MATE?
GANGWAY, KIDS, COMIN' THROUGH!
MAKE YOURSELVES SCARCE, WILLYA--WE'RE TRYIN' T' DO SOME WORK!
WE'RE IN THE WAY, 'BERTO. WE SHOULD GO.
NO WAY, RAHNEY, UNLESS WE'RE FORCED TO.
WE'LL PROBABLY NEVER GET A CHANCE TO SEE STUFF LIKE THIS AGAIN!
IT'S A MADHOUSE--AND THE SHOW STARTS IN AN HOUR--HOW'LL THEY EVER GET READY?!
PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT, I GUESS--THERE SHE IS!
LILA CHENEY!
LEMME SEE--
--OH, BE STILL MY HEART, I THINK I'M IN LOVE!
C'MON, BOBBY. YOU SAY THAT ABOUT ALL THE GIRLS!

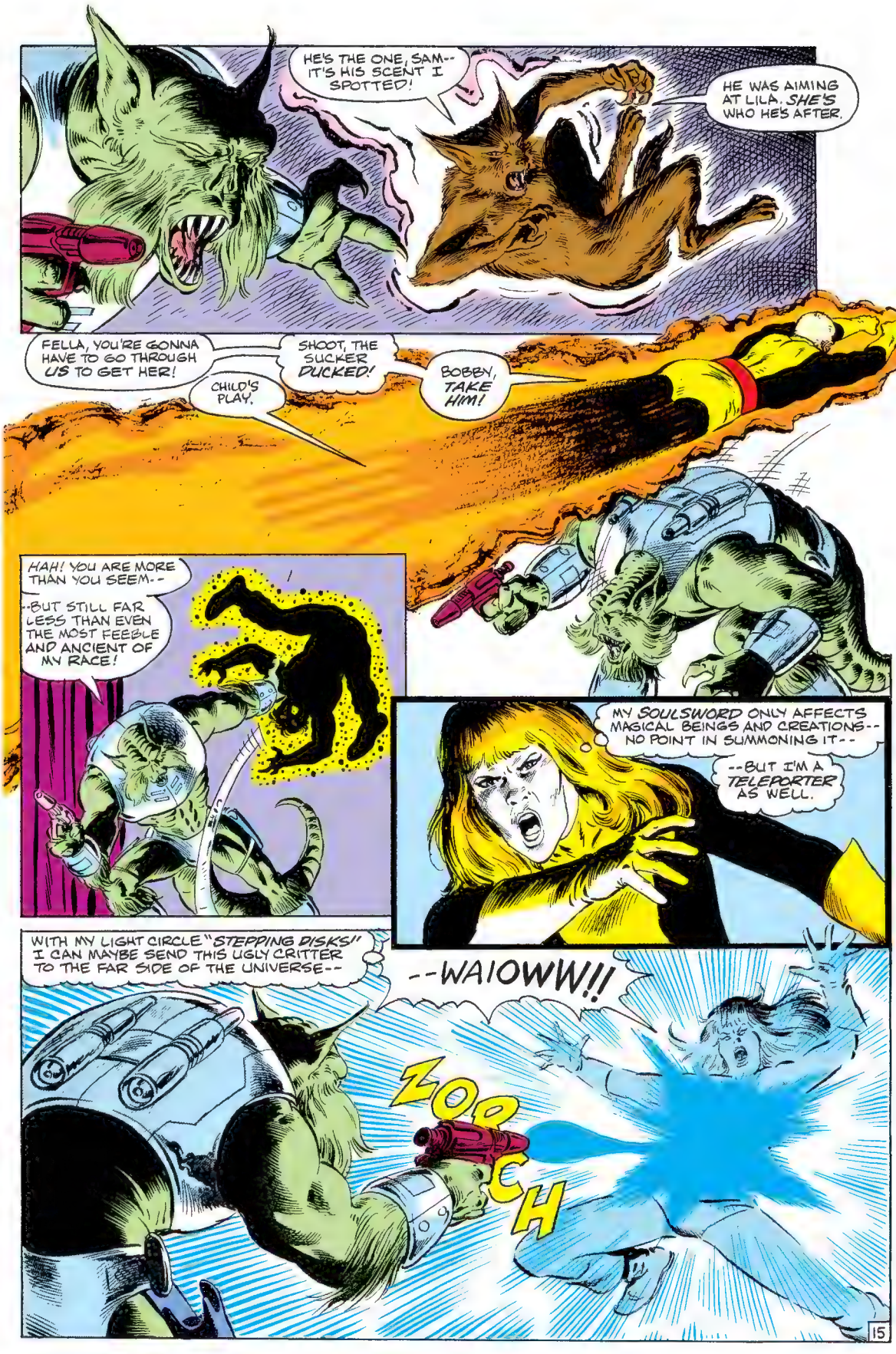
LOOK ALIVE, YOU LOT-- NO MORE MUCKIN' ABOUT--
--IT'S TIME TO ROCK'N'ROLL!
SHE'S GREAT!
SINGS GOOD, TOO!
UHHH... UH-HUH--RIGHT, ILLYANA. AH, TH' HECK WITH IT, AH'M IN LOVE, TOO. WITH THE MUSIC AN' THE LADY.
WE GONNA MEET HER, BOBBY?
I CERTAINLY MEAN TO.
SNAP
BUT THEN...
...WITHOUT WARNING...
ALARM!!
WHA'S WRONG, WARLOCK?
RESTRAINTS ON SOUND PROJECTION STRUCTURE-- FAILURE!
THAT SPEAKER TOWER'S COLLAPSING!
THE MUSIC'S TOO LOUD--
NO ONE ON-STAGE HAS NOTICED!
QUERY: IMMEDIATE COURSE OF ACTION?

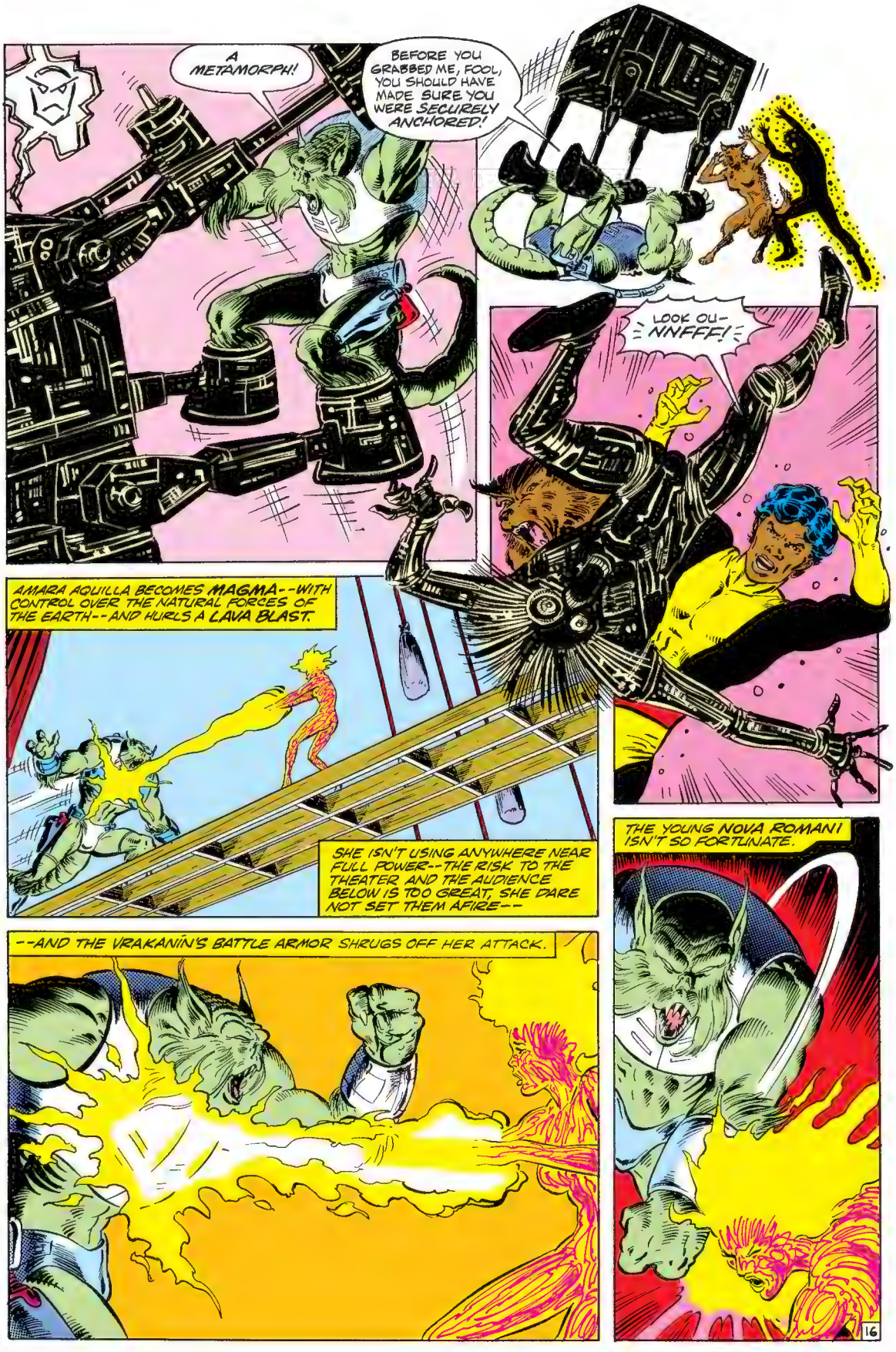
I'LL GRAB THE CHAINS--YOU TRY TO KEEP THE REST OF THE TOWER FROM FALLING!
ROBERTO DA COSTA SHIFTS TO HIS SUPER-STRONG INCARNATION AS SUNSPOT, WHILE HIS COMPANION SHUCKS OFF HIS HUMAN GUISE, REVERTING TO HIS NATURAL APPEARANCE.
WARLOCK IS A METAMORPH...
...ABLE TO RECAST HIS BODY INTO VIRTUALLY ANY FORM IMAGINABLE...
THE TOPMOST SPEAKER--THE GUYS DIDN'T CATCH IT!
IT'S DROPPIN' STRAIGHT FOR LILA!
IF AH CUT POWER AS AH EMERGE FROM THE SIDE-STAGE SHADOWS INTO THE SPOTLIGHT, NO ONE SHOULD REALIZE AH WAS BLASTIN'!
HEY!?!
SORRY 'BOUT THIS, MA'AM!
KRA WHAM!


LILA!
SAM!
ARE Y' HURT?!
YOU ALL RIGHT, BABE?
WHAT IN BLAZES HAPPENED? WHERE'D THIS GUY COME FROM?
GOT A NAME, BLONDIE?
SAM... SAM GUTHRIE.
I'M LILA.
YEAH.
WHO LET THESE BRATS INSIDE--HOW'D THEY GET ON STAGE--THROW 'EM OUT!
WHERE'RE YOUR MANNERS, RODDY? THAT'S NO WAY TO TALK TO THE MAN...
...WHO SAVED MY LIFE!
PARDON MY MANAGER, SAM, LUV. THEY'RE BRED TO BE NASTY.
I OWE YOU--
--AND LILA ALWAYS PAYS HER DEBTS.
IF YOU HAVEN'T ANY PLANS, STOP BY MY PLACE AFTER THE GIG-- I'M THROWING A PARTY.
BRING YOUR FRIENDS, WE'LL HAVE SOME FUN.
SHAKE A LEG, RODDY-- GET THIS MESS PUT BACK TOGETHER-- WE'VE A SHOW TO DO!
YOU LUCKY DOG, GUTHRIE!
SHE... KISSED ME!
SHE CALLED ME "LOVE"
HEY, DON'T HOG ALL THE CREDIT! WARLOCK AND I HELPED, Y'KNOW!

FACE FACTS, SHORTY, LADY KNOWS A CLASS ACT.
NO ACCOUNTING FOR TASTE, THAT'S FOR SURE.
QUIT MAKIN' A FEDERAL CASE OUTTA THIS, BOBBY-- GEEZ!
YOU GOTTA SCORE WITH EVERY GIRL?
FRIENDS--SUSPICION...ANOMALY.
WHAT'CHA GOT, LOCKE?
DISSOLUTION OF SUBSTANCE MOLECULAR COHESION NOT A NATURAL EVENT.
YOU MEAN THE CHAIN WAS CUT?
YES, DANIELLE.
ENERGY RESIDUE INDICATIVE OF MESON DISRUPTOR-- EXPOSURE INSTANTLY RETURNS PRIMARY ATOMIC STRUCTURES TO A FREE STATE.
A--DISINTEGRATOR? IF THAT WAS NO ACCIDENT, THEN SOMEONE WAS TRYING TO MURDER LILA!
RAHNE, SHIFT TO WOLF, SEE WHAT YOUR ENHANCED SENSES CAN TURN UP!
AYE, DANI-- THA' I WILL!
AS RAHNE CHANGES SHAPE, A TELEPATHIC LINK AUTOMATICALLY FORMS BETWEEN HER AND DANI.
>PHAUGGH--<
AN AWFUL STENCH, DANI, LIKE NOTHIN' I'VE EVER SENSED B'FORE. IT MAKES ME ILL.
'TIS A LIVING BEING-- BUT NOT HUMAN, OR EVEN EARTHLY!
I'LL FOLLOW IT!
CARROT-TOP, WAIT FOR US!
WE BETTER HURRY, TEAM, THEY'RE ADMITTIN' THE AUDIENCE!

DANI, BECAUSE OF HER INJURIES, AND DOUG RAMSEY--BECAUSE HIS OWN MUTANT POWER, A FACILITY WITH LANGUAGES, ISN'T MUCH USE IN A SCRAP--ARE LEFT BEHIND...
...THOUGH DANI USES HER PSI-LINK WITH RAHNE TO KEEP TABS ON THE TEAM'S PROGRESS.
AROUND THEM, THE THEATRE EXPLODES WITH LIGHT AND SOUND AS LILA ROARS INTO THE FIRST SET.
NOTHIN' SO FAR.
MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL THE POLICE?
AND TELL THEM WHAT, MENINA?
BOBBY'S RIGHT. THE ONLY WAY WE'LL CONVINCE 'EM IS BY REVEALIN' WHO WE ARE.
THEN WE'LL PROB'LY BE THE ONES WHO GET INTO TROUBLE.
CAREFUL, RAHNE--IT'S A LONG DROP T' TH' FLOOR--
--HOLY?!?
WHAT IS THAT THING?!!
ONE OF THE URAKANIN, GRASS-EATER! WARRIOR, AND HUNTER AM I!
AND YOU PUNY FORMS WILL NOT DENY ME MY RIGHTFUL PREY!
YYIPE!


HE'S THE ONE, SAM-- IT'S HIS SCENT I SPOTTED!
HE WAS AIMING AT LILA. SHE'S WHO HE'S AFTER.
FELLA, YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO GO THROUGH US TO GET HER!
SHOOT, THE SUCKER DUCKED!
CHILD'S PLAY.
BOBBY, TAKE HIM!
HAH! YOU ARE MORE THAN YOU SEEM--
--BUT STILL FAR LESS THAN EVEN THE MOST FEEBLE AND ANCIENT OF MY RACE!
MY SOULSWORD ONLY AFFECTS MAGICAL BEINGS AND CREATIONS-- NO POINT IN SUMMONING IT--
--BUT I'M A TELEPORTER AS WELL.
WITH MY LIGHT CIRCLE "STEPPING DISKS" I CAN MAYBE SEND THIS UGLY CRITTER TO THE FAR SIDE OF THE UNIVERSE--
--WAIOWW!!
ZOOCH


A METAMORPH!
BEFORE YOU GRABBED ME, FOOL, YOU SHOULD HAVE MADE SURE YOU WERE SECURELY ANCHORED!
LOOK OU-
NNFFF!
AMARA AQUILLA BECOMES MAGMA--WITH CONTROL OVER THE NATURAL FORCES OF THE EARTH--AND HURLS A LAVA BLAST.
SHE ISN'T USING ANYWHERE NEAR FULL POWER--THE RISK TO THE THEATER AND THE AUDIENCE BELOW IS TOO GREAT, SHE DARE NOT SET THEM AFIRE--
--AND THE VRAKANIN'S BATTLE ARMOR SHRUGS OFF HER ATTACK.
THE YOUNG NOVA ROMANI ISN'T SO FORTUNATE.

THE CHENEY FEMALE BEGINS TO GLOW!
BUT HER STARPULSE IS STILL WEAK, I MAY YET COMPLETE MY MISSION AND CLAIM HER LIFE!
NOT IF AH'VE GOT ANY SAY IN THE MATTER, BUSTER!
WHO IS THIS CREEP?!
WHAT'S HIS CONNECTION WITH LILA?! HE TALKS LIKE HE KNOWS HER!
WHAMMO
THE IMPACT SHAKES THE GRID...
...BUT ONLY LILA NOTICES.
AS IF IN RESPONSE, SHE TEARS INTO A WILDLY PASSIONATE GUITAR RIFF.
OVERHEAD, HER WOULD-BE ASSASSIN SHRIEKS IN AGONY.
TO THE MUTANTS' SURPRISE-- AND HORROR--
--SO DOES WARLOCK!
THEN...
THE ALIEN'S ARMOR AND WEAPONS--
--THEY EXPLODED!?!

THE BLAST SHATTERS THE GRID BEAMS..
SAM!!
THE VRAKANIN HAS BARELY BEGUN TO FALL WHEN HE IS CONSUMED BY A CORRUSCATING NIMBUS OF ENERGY.
THE AUDIENCE CHEERS--THEY BELIEVE THIS MERELY THE LATEST OF THE BAND'S LEGENDARY SPECIAL EFFECTS STUNTS. NONE OF THEM CAN SEE SAM GUTHRIE HANGING ON FOR DEAR LIFE.
LILA'S GLOW SHIFTS UP THROUGH THE SPECTRUM, QUICKLY BECOMING SO BRIGHT THAT NONE CAN STAND TO LOOK DIRECTLY AT HER. THE MUSIC KEEPING PACE, BUILDING AS WELL IN TEMPO AND INTENSITY.
LOCKE! I'VE NE'ER SEEN HIM IN SUCH A STATE!
WAVES... POWER-- OVERLOAD-- DIS-CORPORATION IMMINENT!
HIS SPEECH IS SO DISORIENTED, HE'S BARELY ABLE TO TALK.
I DON'T LIKE THIS. WE'VE GOT TO GET HIM BACK TO THE PROFESSOR.
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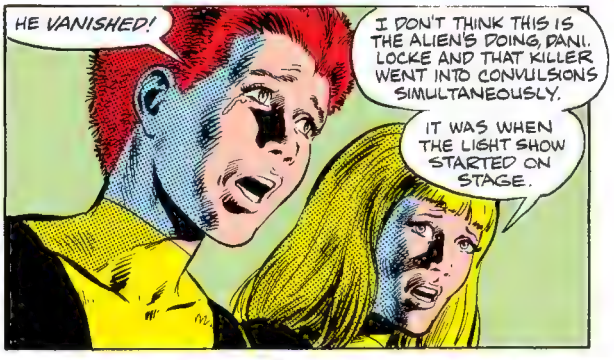
THE BEAT BUILDS, ONE SONG FLOWING INTO THE NEXT WITHOUT A BREAK.
HELP ME, SOMEONE!
HE'S TOO HEAVY, I CAN'T HOLD ON MUCH LONGER!
SAM, THEY CAN'T HEAR ME, THE MUSIC'S TOO LOUD! BLAST YOURSELF TO SAFETY!
AH'M TRYIN', AMARA! BUT AH CAN'T GET AN IGNITION!
THE MUSIC DRIVES THE CROWD INTO A FRENZY...
...AND THEIR EXCITEMENT--THE RAW PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ENERGY--ACTS ON LILA LIKE A SUPERCHARGER.
SHE HITS AN IMPOSSIBLE CRESCENDO...
...AND LIGHTNING EXPLODES FROM HER TO THE SPEAKER TOWERS...
...FROM THEM TO SAM.
AND THEN, SO SUDDENLY THAT AT FIRST NO ONE REALIZES WHAT'S HAPPENED...
THEY'RE GONE!
THE BAND--LILA--SAM--
--THEY ALL DISAPPEARED!

THE AUDIENCE, OF COURSE, WANTS MORE.
WHILE SECURITY TEAMS TRY TO KEEP ORDER, THEATER STAFFERS FRANTICALLY SEARCH FOR LILA...
...BUT SHE'S NOWHERE TO BE FOUND.


HE VANISHED!
I DON'T THINK THIS IS THE ALIEN'S DOING, DANI. LOCKE AND THAT KILLER WENT INTO CONVULSIONS SIMULTANEOUSLY.
IT WAS WHEN THE LIGHT SHOW STARTED ON STAGE.

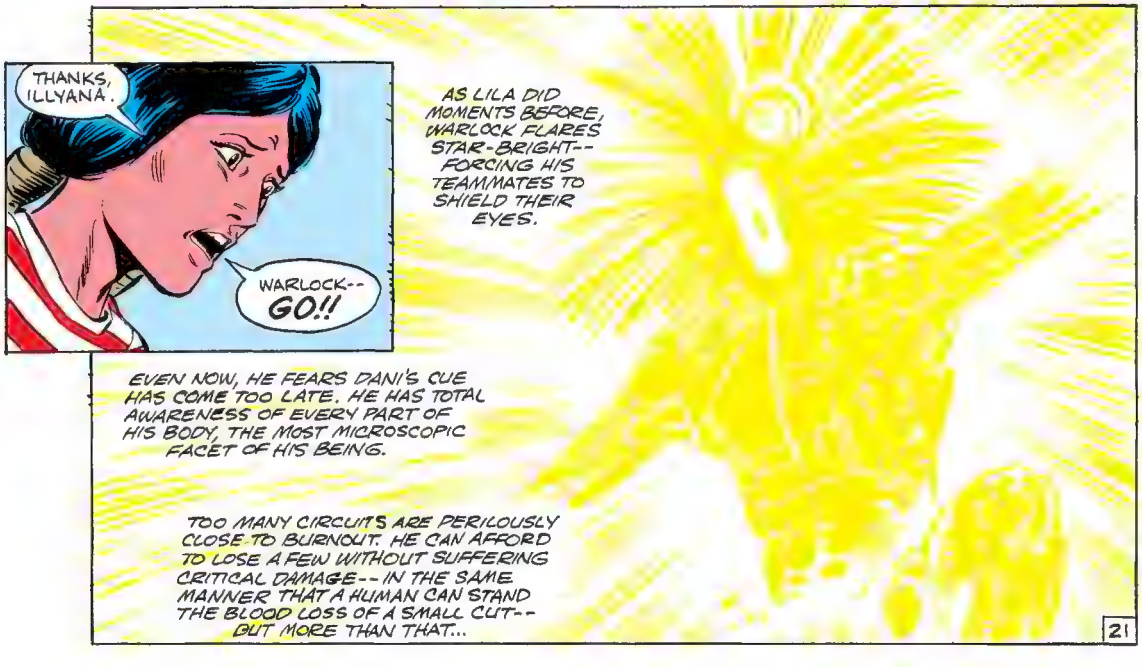
DANI--TROUBLE!

WAS... ENERGY PULSE-- SOUND PILLARS MASK... STARGATE! MATRIX THIS SIZE... CAPABLE OF HURLING OBJECTS... TO OPPOSITE SIDE... GALAXY!
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT? LILA'S A ROCK SINGER?!
SELF... SATURATED WITH... POWER-- TOO MUCH... FOR SYSTEM TO HANDLE!

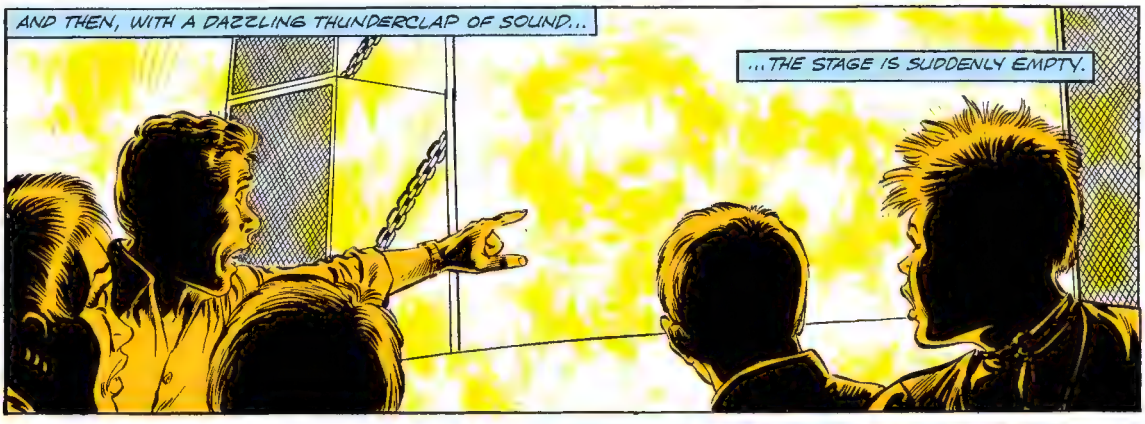
WHAT HAPPENED TO WARLOCK-- DID THE ALIEN HURT HIM?
WHERE'S SAM?!

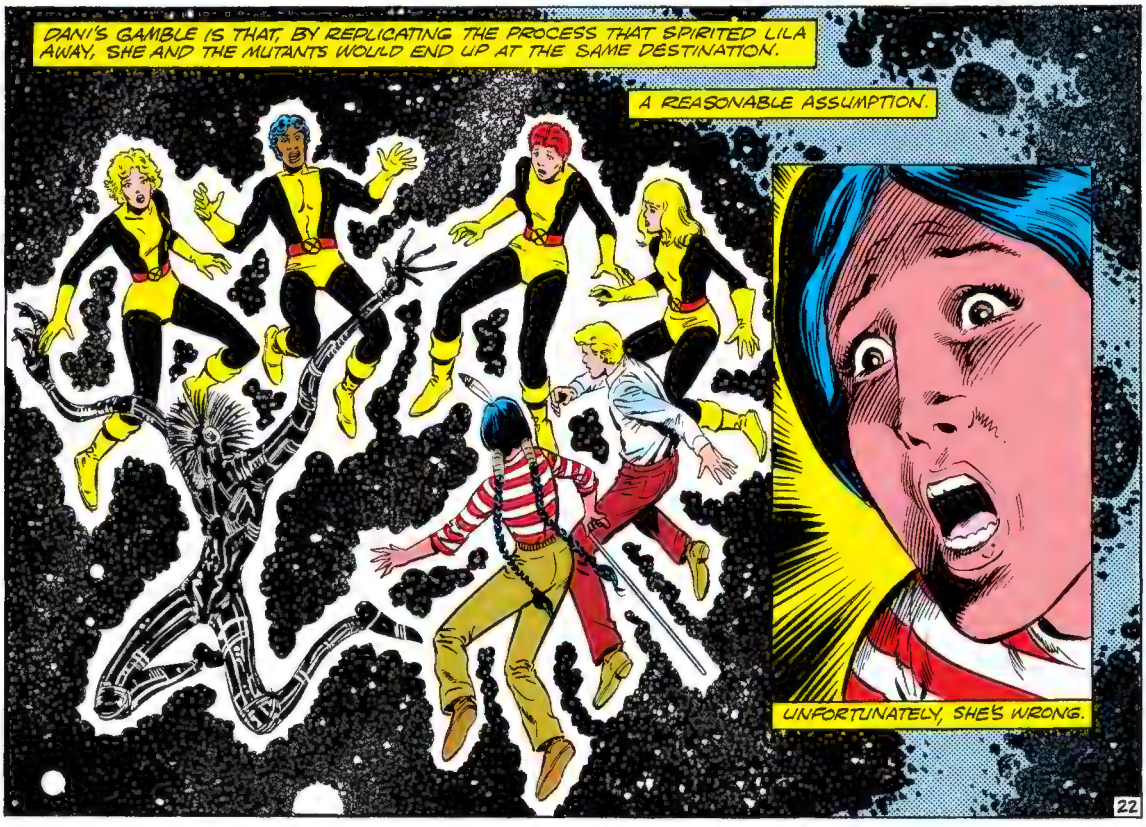
MUST DRAIN EXCESS...
...BEFORE VIOLENT DISCORPORATION... SELF!
RESULTANT ENERGY DISCHARGE-- EXPLOSION--LAY WASTE... PLANETARY HEMISPHERE!

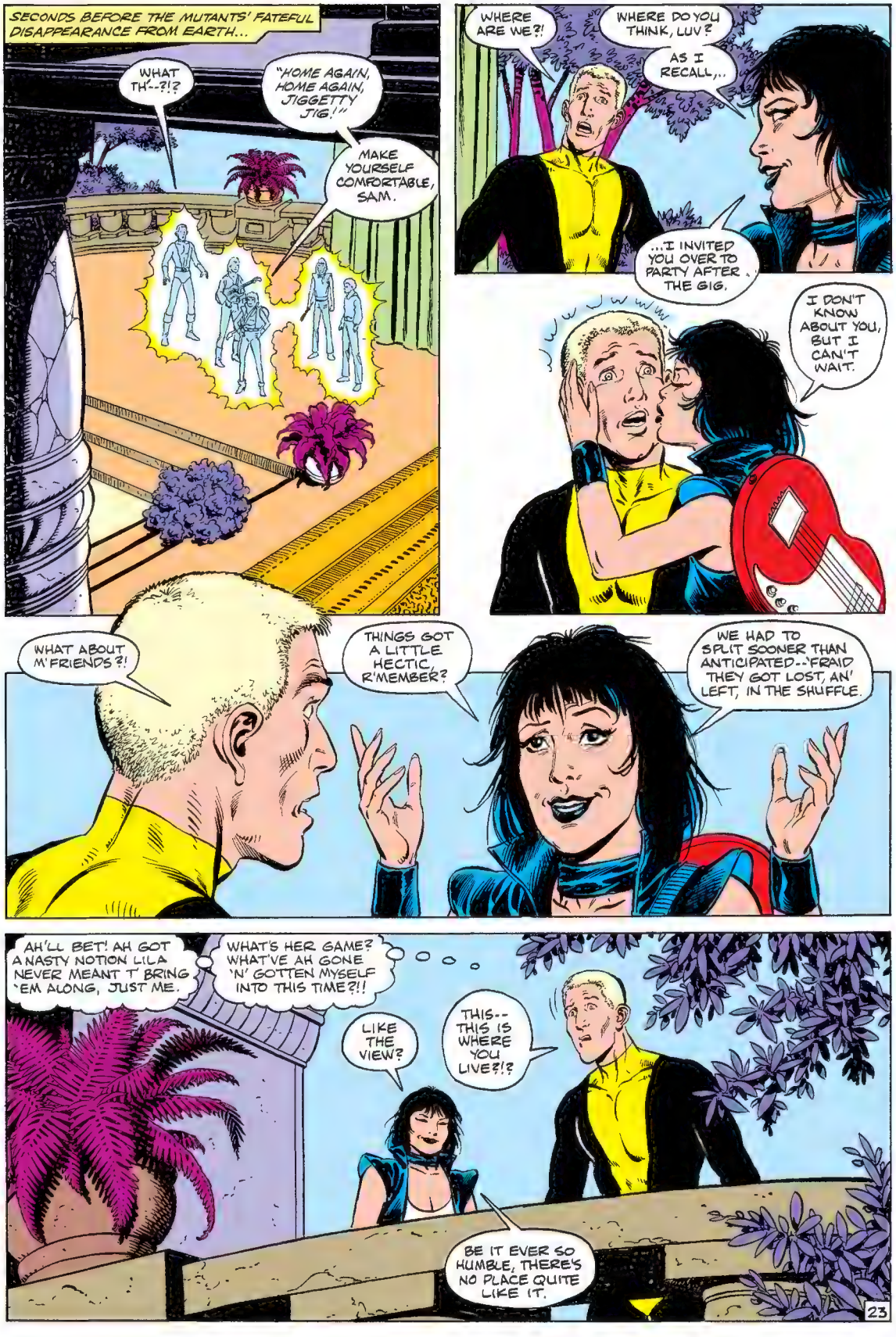
LOCKE, CAN YOU USE THAT POWER TO ACTIVATE THE STARGATE?
YES!
WHAT DO YOU PLAN, DANI?!
WE ARE BUT STUDENTS--NOVICES--
SHOULD WE NOT SUMMON PROFESSOR XAVIER AND THE X-MEN?!
LILA KIDNAPPED OUR TEAMMATE. I MEAN TO GET HIM BACK!
THERE'S NO TIME!
LOOK AT HIM, AMARA! WE'LL NEVER GET HIM OUT OF THE THEATER!
I'M THE LEADER OF THIS OUTFIT--I'LL GO ALONE IF I HAVE TO--THIS IS MY DECISION, MY RESPONSIBILITY.
IT'S NO LESS THAN WE DID LAST WINTER FOR KITTY PRYDE.*
WHATEVER THE DANGER, THE NEW MUTANTS LOOK AFTER THEIR OWN.
*N/M#'S 15-17--ANN N.

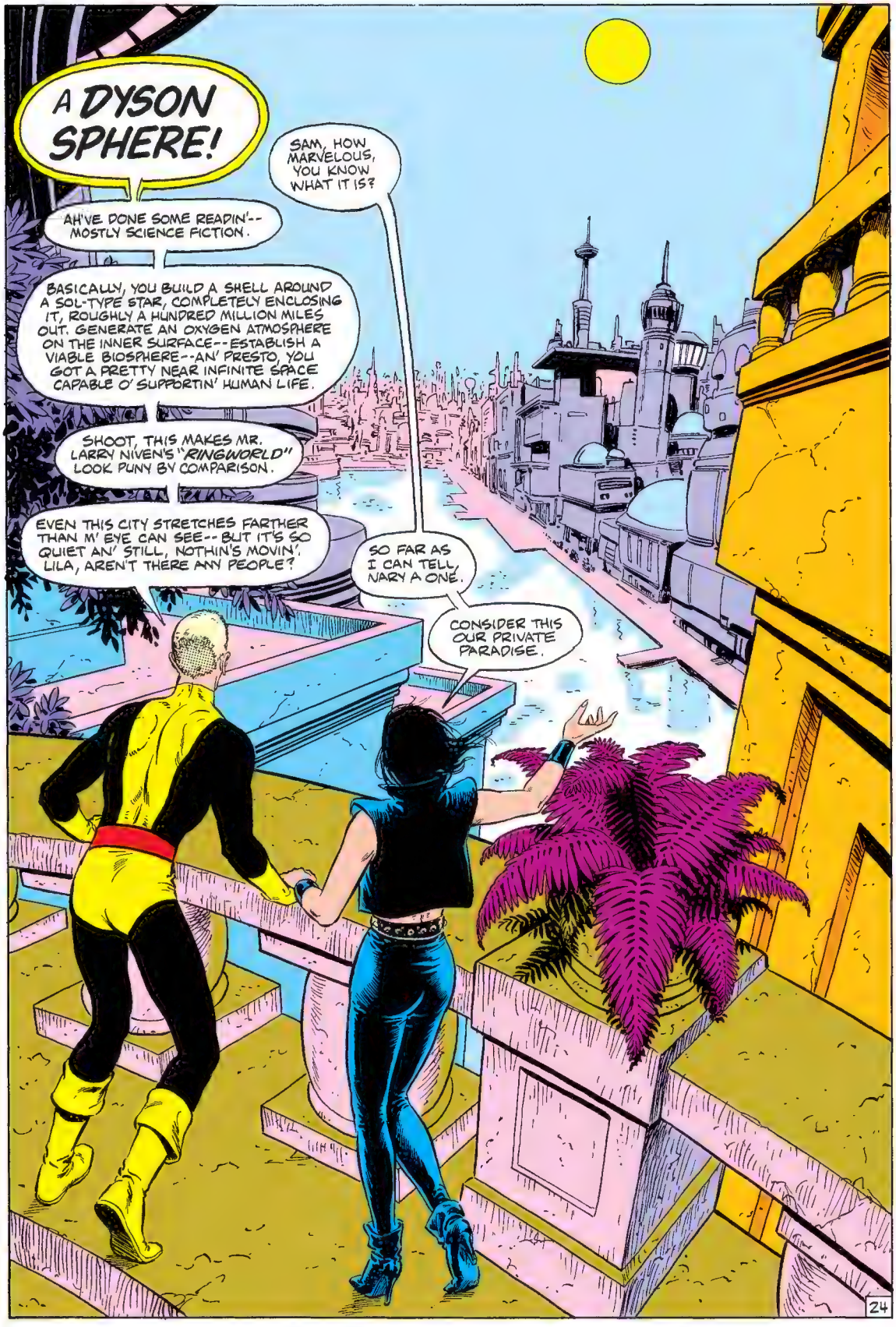

THANKS, ILLYANA.
WARLOCK--GO!!
AS LILA DID MOMENTS BEFORE, WARLOCK FLARES STAR-BRIGHT--FORCING HIS TEAMMATES TO SHIELD THEIR EYES.
EVEN NOW, HE FEARS DANI'S CUE HAS COME TOO LATE. HE HAS TOTAL AWARENESS OF EVERY PART OF HIS BODY, THE MOST MICROSCOPIC FACET OF HIS BEING.
TOO MANY CIRCUITS ARE PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO BURNOUT. HE CAN AFFORD TO LOSE A FEW WITHOUT SUFFERING CRITICAL DAMAGE--IN THE SAME MANNER THAT A HUMAN CAN STAND THE BLOOD LOSS OF A SMALL CUT--BUT MORE THAN THAT...

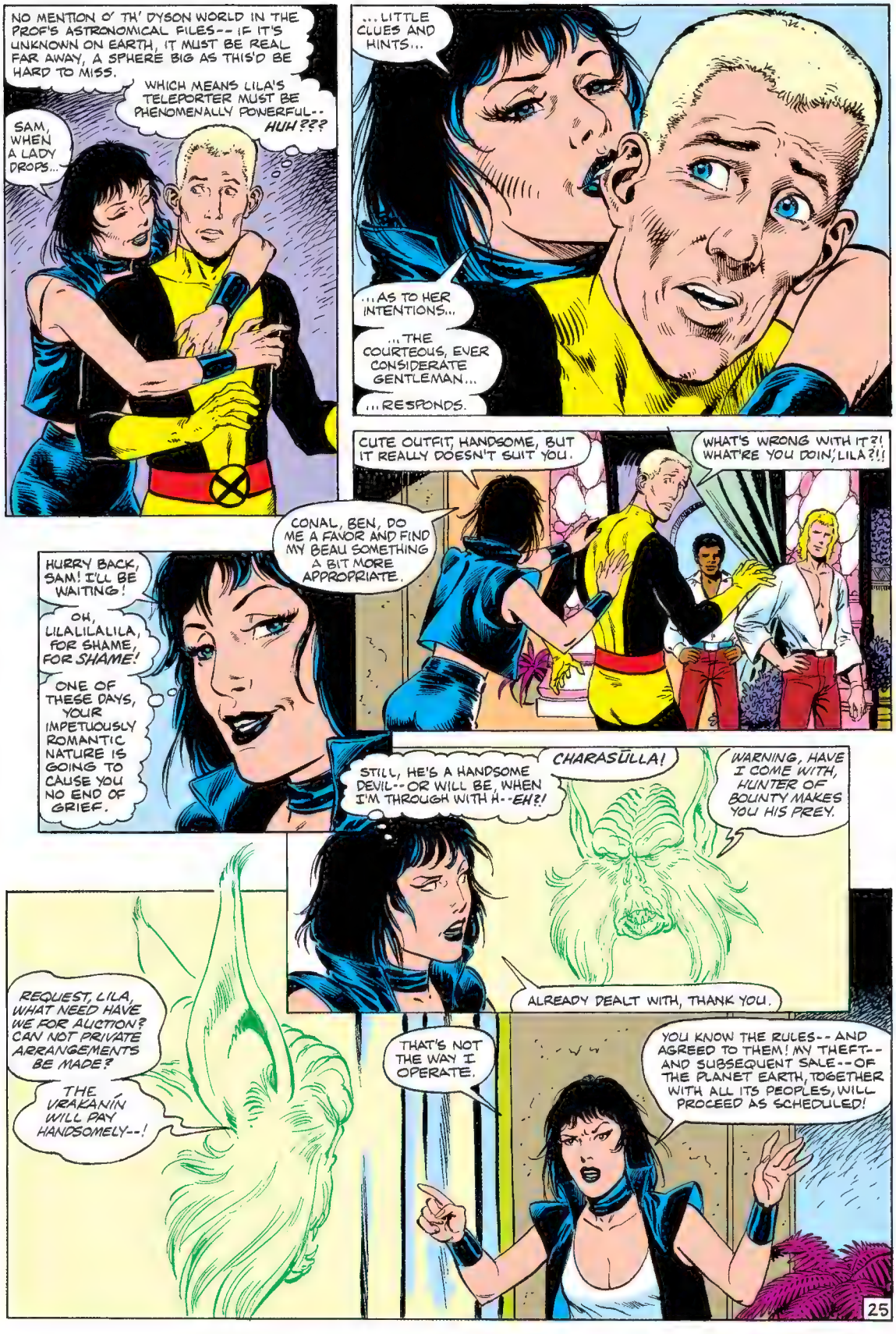
IT FEELS VERY STRANGE TO SUDDENLY REALIZE YOU'VE BECOME FORM WITHOUT SUBSTANCE, AS THE MUTANTS FIND THEMSELVES CONVERTED TO BEINGS OF PURE ENERGY. THEY LIVE, THEY RETAIN CONSCIOUS AWARENESS--BUT THEY DON'T FEEL QUITE... REAL.
THEIR PERCEPTIONS CHANGE AS WELL, THEIR UNIVERSE BECOMING A WONDERLAND OF LIGHT AND COLOR.


AND THEN, WITH A DAZZLING THUNDERCLAP OF SOUND...
...THE STAGE IS SUDDENLY EMPTY.

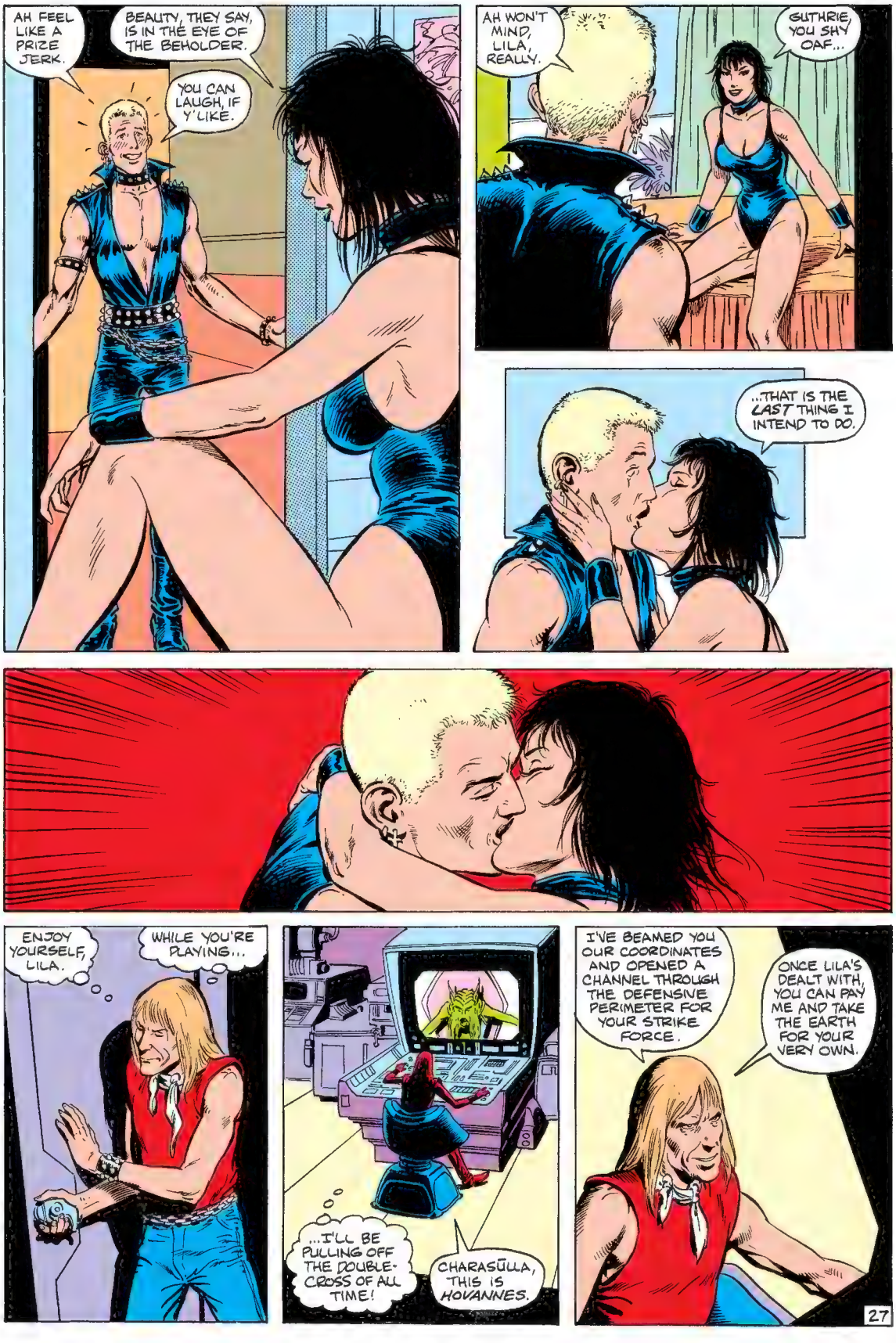

DANI'S GAMBLE IS THAT, BY REPLICATING THE PROCESS THAT SPIRITED LILA AWAY, SHE AND THE MUTANTS WOULD END UP AT THE SAME DESTINATION.
A REASONABLE ASSUMPTION.
UNFORTUNATELY, SHE'S WRONG.


SECONDS BEFORE THE MUTANTS' FATEFUL DISAPPEARANCE FROM EARTH...
WHAT TH'--?!?
"HOME AGAIN, HOME AGAIN, JIGGETY JIG!"
MAKE YOURSELF COMFORTABLE, SAM.
WHERE ARE WE?!
WHERE DO YOU THINK, LUV?
AS I RECALL,..
...I INVITED YOU OVER TO PARTY AFTER THE GIG.
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I CAN'T WAIT.
WHAT ABOUT M'FRIENDS?!
THINGS GOT A LITTLE HECTIC, R'MEMBER?
WE HAD TO SPLIT SOONER THAN ANTICIPATED--'FRAID THEY GOT LOST, AN' LEFT, IN THE SHUFFLE.
AH'LL BET! AH GOT A NASTY NOTION LILA NEVER MEANT T' BRING 'EM ALONG, JUST ME.
WHAT'S HER GAME? WHAT'VE AH GONE 'N' GOTTEN MYSELF INTO THIS TIME?!!
LIKE THE VIEW?
THIS-- THIS IS WHERE YOU LIVE?!?
BE IT EVER SO HUMBLE, THERE'S NO PLACE QUITE LIKE IT.


A DYSON SPHERE!
SAM, HOW MARVELOUS, YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS?
AH'VE DONE SOME READIN'-- MOSTLY SCIENCE FICTION.
BASICALLY, YOU BUILD A SHELL AROUND A SOL-TYPE STAR, COMPLETELY ENCLOSING IT, ROUGHLY A HUNDRED MILLION MILES OUT. GENERATE AN OXYGEN ATMOSPHERE ON THE INNER SURFACE--ESTABLISH A VIABLE BIOSPHERE--AN' PRESTO, YOU GOT A PRETTY NEAR INFINITE SPACE CAPABLE O' SUPPORTIN' HUMAN LIFE.
SHOOT, THIS MAKES MR. LARRY NIVEN'S "RINGWORLD" LOOK PUNY BY COMPARISON.
EVEN THIS CITY STRETCHES FARTHER THAN M' EYE CAN SEE--BUT IT'S SO QUIET AN' STILL, NOTHIN'S MOVIN', LILA, AREN'T THERE ANY PEOPLE?
SO FAR AS I CAN TELL, NARY A ONE.
CONSIDER THIS OUR PRIVATE PARADISE.


NO MENTION O' TH' DYSON WORLD IN THE PROF'S ASTRONOMICAL FILES-- IF IT'S UNKNOWN ON EARTH, IT MUST BE REAL FAR AWAY, A SPHERE BIG AS THIS'D BE HARD TO MISS.
WHICH MEANS LILA'S TELEPORTER MUST BE PHENOMENALLY POWERFUL-- HUH???
SAM, WHEN A LADY DROPS...
...LITTLE CLUES AND HINTS...
...AS TO HER INTENTIONS...
...THE COURTEOUS, EVER CONSIDERATE GENTLEMAN...
...RESPONDS.
CUTE OUTFIT, HANDSOME, BUT IT REALLY DOESN'T SUIT YOU.
WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?! WHAT'RE YOU DOIN', LILA?!!
CONAL, BEN, DO ME A FAVOR AND FIND MY BEAU SOMETHING A BIT MORE APPROPRIATE.
HURRY BACK, SAM! I'LL BE WAITING!
OH, LILALILALILA, FOR SHAME, FOR SHAME!
ONE OF THESE DAYS, YOUR IMPETUOUSLY ROMANTIC NATURE IS GOING TO CAUSE YOU NO END OF GRIEF.
STILL, HE'S A HANDSOME DEVIL--OR WILL BE, WHEN I'M THROUGH WITH H--EH?!
CHARASŪLLA!
WARNING, HAVE I COME WITH, HUNTER OF BOUNTY MAKES YOU HIS PREY.
ALREADY DEALT WITH, THANK YOU.
REQUEST, LILA, WHAT NEED HAVE WE FOR AUCTION? CAN NOT PRIVATE ARRANGEMENTS BE MADE?
THE VRAKANÍN WILL PAY HANDSOMELY--!
THAT'S NOT THE WAY I OPERATE.
YOU KNOW THE RULES-- AND AGREED TO THEM! MY THEFT-- AND SUBSEQUENT SALE-- OF THE PLANET EARTH, TOGETHER WITH ALL ITS PEOPLES, WILL PROCEED AS SCHEDULED!

HER LAST THOUGHTS WERE ANGRY AND BITTER...
...AS LUNGS SCREAMED FOR AIR...
...AND COLD FROZE HER LIMBS.
SHE WELCOMED OBLIVION, WHEN IT CAME.
GASP!
AIR! I CAN BREATHE!! I'M ALIVE!!!
GREAT SPIRIT BE PRAISED, WE'RE ALL ALIVE!!!
WAIT-- SOMEONE'S MISSING!
DANIELLE--?
LOCKE, IS THIS SPACECRAFT-- YOU?
INTERROGATIVE AFFIRMED. PLEASURE--ODD, WELCOME SENSATION--GIVEN SELF AT CONFIRMATION, YOUR HEALTH. WORRIED WAS SELF, ACTED NOT IN TIME, DID THINGS WRONG TO SAVE YOU.
I'M A LITTLE STIFF, BUT OTHERWISE OKAY.
WHAT HAPPENED TO US?
TRANSMIT SETTINGS ON STARGATE SHIFTED FRACTIONALLY AFTER INITIAL USAGE...
A BOOBY-TRAP! LILA DIDN'T WANT ANYONE FOLLOWING HER. KIND'A SUSPICIOUS, DON'T'CHA THINK?
AFFIRMATIVE. FORTUNATELY SELF POSSESSED SUFFICIENT EXCESS ENERGY...
...TO CONSTRUCT SUITABLE HABITAT FOR COMPANIONS.
IF NOT FOR THAT, WE'D ALL BE DEAD-- AND IT'D BE MY FAULT! SOME LEADER I AM!
FALSE STATEMENT. HAD YOU NOT ACTED, BILLIONS WOULD HAVE CEASED TO BE. WOULD THAT HAVE BEEN PREFERABLE?
NO.
LOCKE, CAN YOU GET US HOME?
DOUBTFUL. HOWEVER, SENSORS ARE AWARE OF ABERRANT CELESTIAL BODY APPROXIMATELY ONE LIGHT-YEAR DISTANT. PROBABILITY HIGH THAT IT IS LILA CHENEY'S DESTINATION.
SELF POSSESSES SUFFICIENT POWER TO REACH OBJECT.
LET'S GO, THEN, FAST AS YOU CAN!


AH FEEL LIKE A PRIZE JERK.
BEAUTY, THEY SAY, IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER.
YOU CAN LAUGH, IF Y'LIKE.
AH WON'T MIND, LILA, REALLY.
GUTHRIE, YOU SHY OAF...
...THAT IS THE LAST THING I INTEND TO DO.
ENJOY YOURSELF, LILA.
WHILE YOU'RE PLAYING...
...I'LL BE PULLING OFF THE DOUBLE-CROSS OF ALL TIME!
CHARASŪLLA, THIS IS HOVANNES.
I'VE BEAMED YOU OUR COORDINATES AND OPENED A CHANNEL THROUGH THE DEFENSIVE PERIMETER FOR YOUR STRIKE FORCE.
ONCE LILA'S DEALT WITH, YOU CAN PAY ME AND TAKE THE EARTH FOR YOUR VERY OWN.

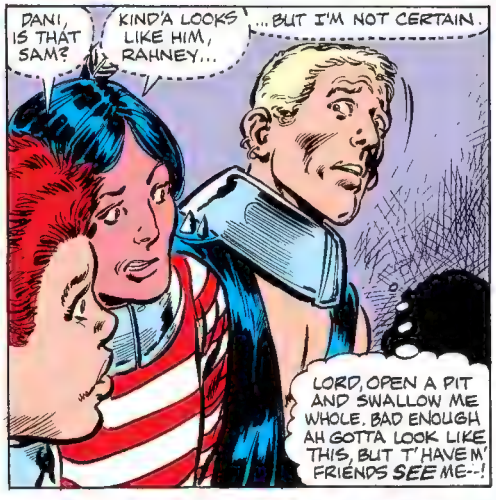
DOUGLAS, ARE YOU COMING OR WHAT--?!
HUH?! OH, YEAH, ILLYANA, SORRY-- JUST LEMME GET SOME MORE NOTES.
THIS IS GREAT!
I COULD SPEND A LIFETIME-- SCORES OF 'EM, I'LL BET-- EXPLORING THIS WORLD AND BARELY SCRATCH THE SURFACE!
UNLESS WE FIND LILA-- AND A WAY HOME--
YOU MAY GET YOUR CHANCE.
IT TOOK US A DAY TO REACH HERE, AND WE'VE BEEN WANDERING AROUND THIS CITY FOR THE BETTER PART OF ANOTHER--THE PROF MUST BE GETTING AWFUL WORRIED.
WHAT'LL HE TELL MY FOLKS?
HE'LL THINK OF SOMETHING, DON'T WORRY. HE ALWAYS DOES.
WATCH YOUR STEP.
NO PROBLEM. I'VE DONE SOME CLIMBING, I'VE GOT A GOOD HEAD FOR...
...HEIGHTS.
SO I SEE.
ILLYANA, WHERE'S THE GROUND?!
WARLOCK ESTIMATES IT'S A TEN MILE DROP.
AHUHM... WOULD YOU HOLD MY HAND, PLEASE?
LISTEN! SOMETHING'S COMING-- LOOK OUT!
CRIPES, WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!
THEY ARE THE SAME CREATURES AS THE ONE WE FOUGHT IN THE THEATER!
TAKE 'EM, AMARA!
YIPE!

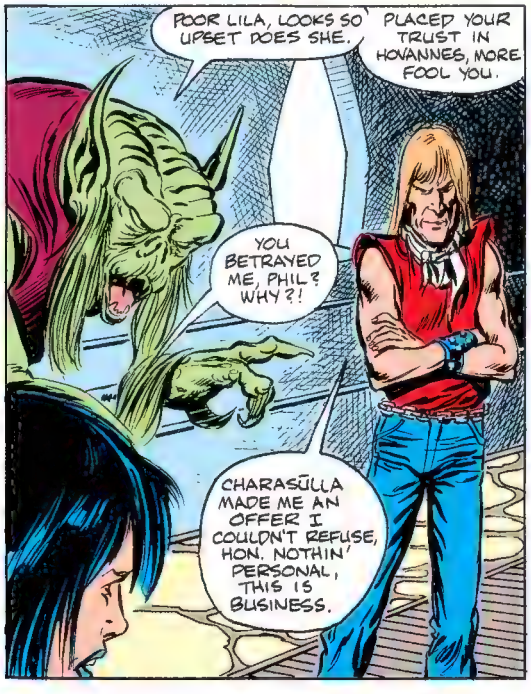
GREAT SHOT, MAGMA!
GET OFF THIS BRIDGE, WE'RE SITTING DUCKS OUT HERE! EVERYONE HEAD FOR THE TOWER!
MY LEGS-- THEY'RE GIVING WAY-- AIEEE!
RAHNE SEES HER SOUL-MATE FALL AND THROUGH THEIR RAPPORT...
...FEELS HER AGONY...
DINNA FRET, DANI! I'LL HAVE YOU UNDER COVER IN A JIFF!
DARN, DARN, DARN-- I'M NO BLASTED USE IN A FIGHT, RAHNE. I CAN'T RUN, I CAN'T EVEN STAND--!
OH, HUSH! WHAT D'YOU EXPECT--
--D'MANDIN SO MUCH O' YUIRSELF...
...BEFORE YOU'RE FULLY HEALED?!
AEIOWW!!
THE MONSTERS SHATTERED THE BRIDGE--RAHNE AND DANI ARE FALLING!
SKAWAM

WE'RE SO HIGH, IT'LL TAKE A WHILE FOR THEM TO HIT THE GROUND.
IF I CAN GRAB A SKYSLED...
...I'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO REACH THEM!
EVEN AS SUNSPOT ACCOMPLISHES HIS INITIAL OBJECTIVE...
...WARLOCK TRANSFORMS HIMSELF INTO A FLOATER AND CATCHES THE GIRLS.
UNFORTUNATELY...
AT THE ELECTRO-NET'S TOUCH, ALL THREE MUTANTS ARE STUNNED INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS, WHILE, NOT FAR AWAY...
...ROBERTO IS DISCOVERING, TO HIS DISMAY, THAT SEIZING A SLED...
SPUT
COUGH
KCHKCHK
...IS A FAR CRY FROM FLYING IT.
WOWWWWW
OH, NOOOOOOOO...

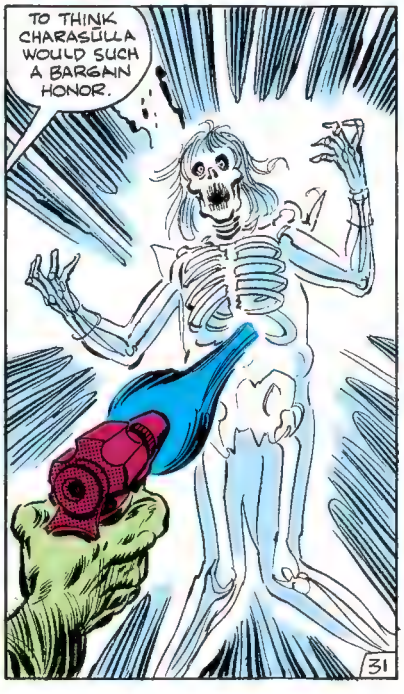
ONE OF THEIR NUMBER IS PRESUMED CRASHED, LORD.
CADRES ARE SEARCHING FOR THE REMAINDER.
THAT'S A BREAK FOR US. THEY COULD BE WRONG ABOUT 'BERTO. DOUG WON'T BE MUCH HELP, BUT SO LONG AS AMARA AND ILLYANA ARE FREE, WE'RE NOT BEATEN, BY A LONG SHOT.
YOUR EXCEPTIONAL ABILITIES WILL AVAIL YOU NAUGHT, TERRANS. SLAVER SHACKLES, YOU WEAR, RENDER YOU HELPLESS.
GOOD PRICE, YOU SHALL BRING, WHEN ALONG WITH YOUR WORLD YOU ARE SOLD. AS FOR THIEF, DARLING LILA...

...KNOWS SHE INTO WHOSE HANDS SHE WILL FALL. HOPE IS MINE THAT A LONG TIME DYING SHE WILL BE.


DANI, IS THAT SAM?
KIND'A LOOKS LIKE HIM, RAHNEY...
...BUT I'M NOT CERTAIN.
LORD, OPEN A PIT AND SWALLOW ME WHOLE. BAD ENOUGH AH GOTTA LOOK LIKE THIS, BUT T'HAVE M' FRIENDS SEE ME--!


POOR LILA, LOOKS SO UPSET DOES SHE.
PLACED YOUR TRUST IN HOVANNES, MORE FOOL YOU.
YOU BETRAYED ME, PHIL? WHY?!
CHARASŪLLA MADE ME AN OFFER I COULDN'T REFUSE, HON. NOTHIN' PERSONAL, THIS IS BUSINESS.

GREEDY MAN.
BUT ALSO STUPID.


TO THINK CHARASŪLLA WOULD SUCH A BARGAIN HONOR.
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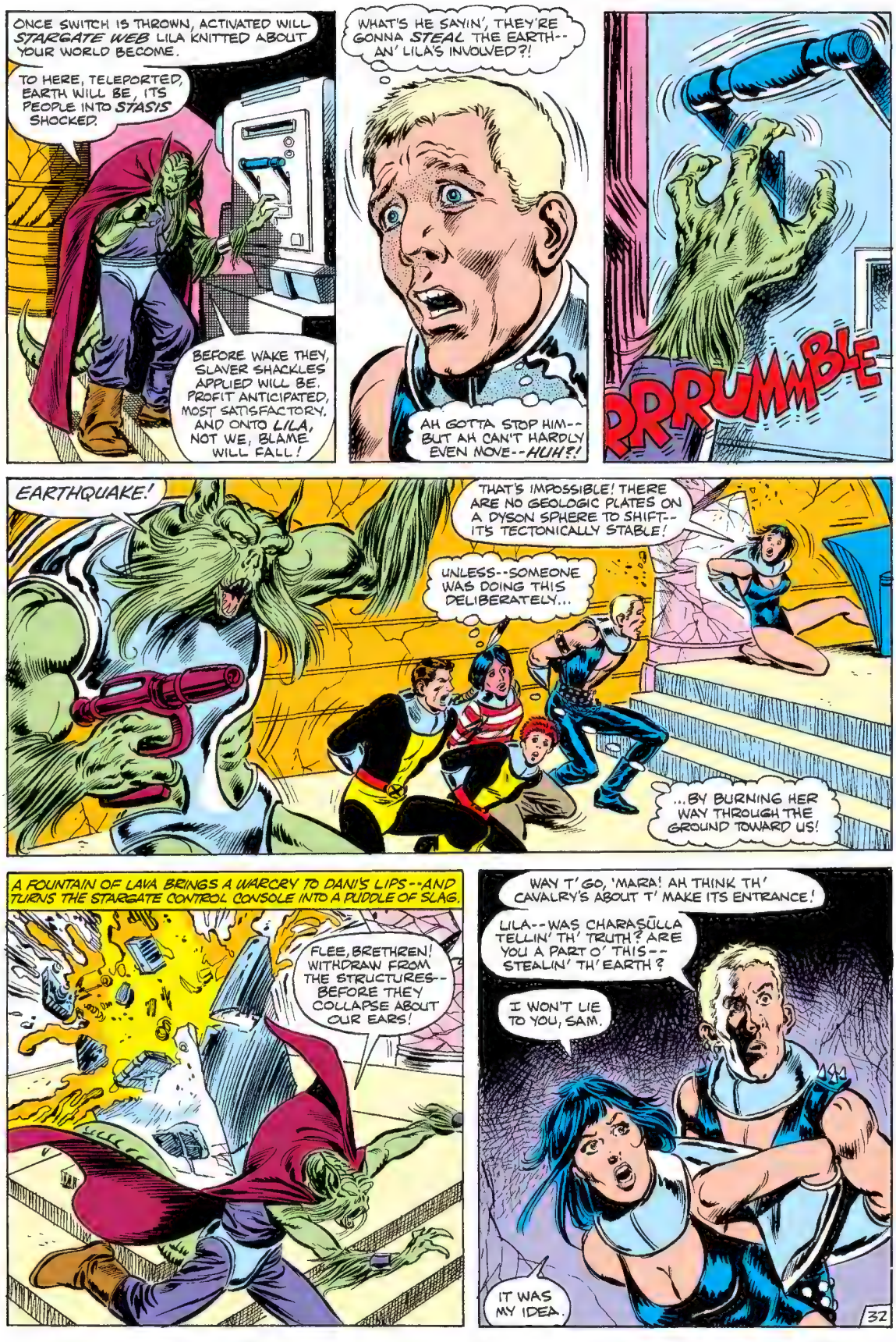
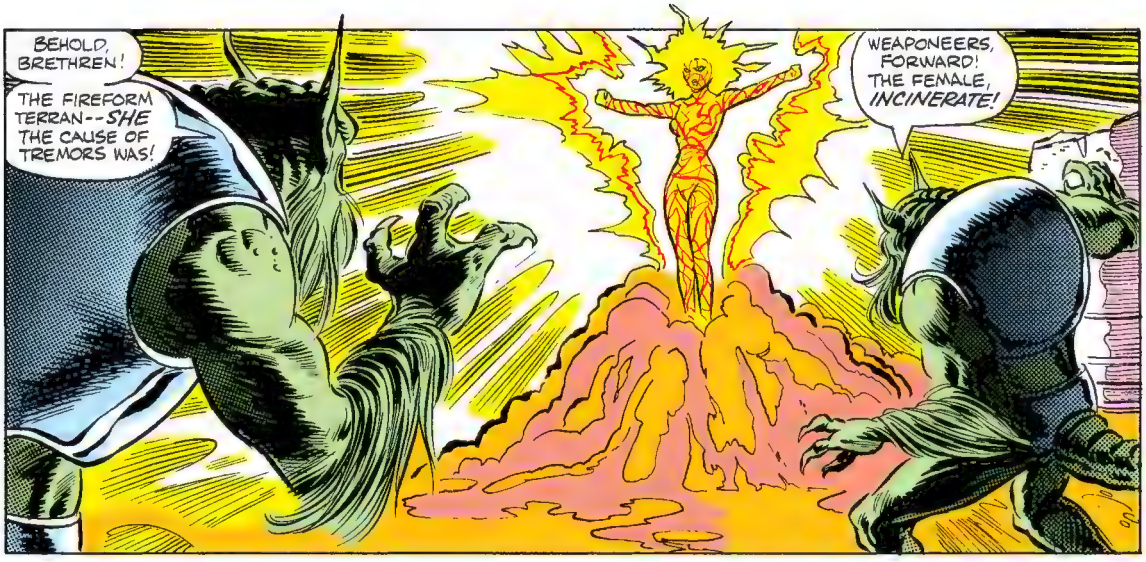
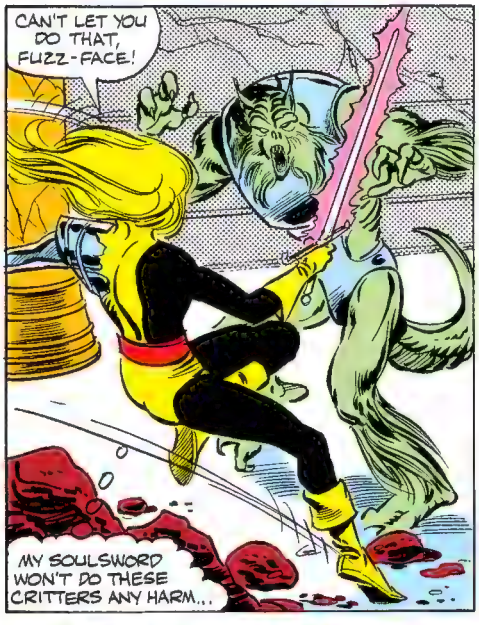
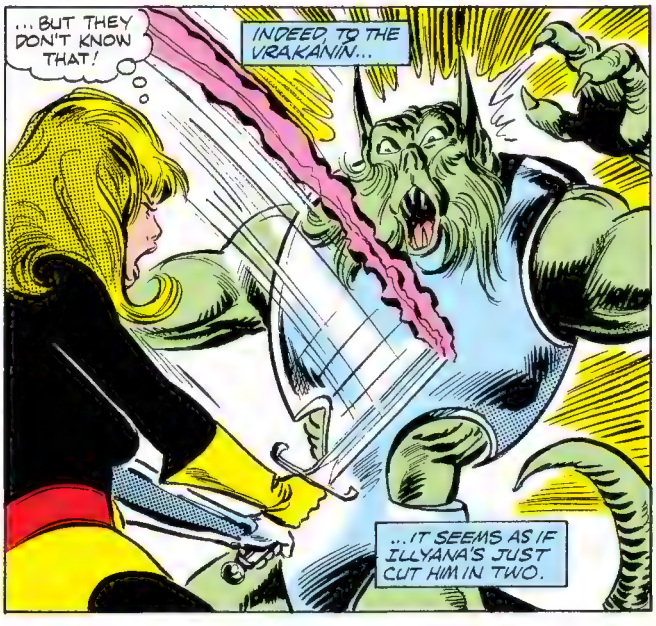

ONCE SWITCH IS THROWN, ACTIVATED WILL STARGATE WEB LILA KNITTED ABOUT YOUR WORLD BECOME.
TO HERE, TELEPORTED, EARTH WILL BE, ITS PEOPLE INTO STASIS SHOCKED.
BEFORE WAKE THEY, SLAVER SHACKLES APPLIED WILL BE. PROFIT ANTICIPATED, MOST SATISFACTORY. AND ONTO LILA, NOT WE, BLAME WILL FALL!
WHAT'S HE SAYIN', THEY'RE GONNA STEAL THE EARTH--AN' LILA'S INVOLVED?!
AH GOTTA STOP HIM--BUT AH CAN'T HARDLY EVEN MOVE--HUH?!
RRRUMMBLE
EARTHQUAKE!
THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! THERE ARE NO GEOLOGIC PLATES ON A DYSON SPHERE TO SHIFT--IT'S TECTONICALLY STABLE!
UNLESS--SOMEONE WAS DOING THIS DELIBERATELY...
...BY BURNING HER WAY THROUGH THE GROUND TOWARD US!
A FOUNTAIN OF LAVA BRINGS A WARCRY TO DANI'S LIPS--AND TURNS THE STARGATE CONTROL CONSOLE INTO A PUDDLE OF SLAG.
FLEE, BRETHREN! WITHDRAW FROM THE STRUCTURES--BEFORE THEY COLLAPSE ABOUT OUR EARS!
WAY T' GO, 'MARA! AH THINK TH' CAVALRY'S ABOUT T' MAKE ITS ENTRANCE!
LILA--WAS CHARASŪLLA TELLIN' TH' TRUTH? ARE YOU A PART O' THIS--STEALIN' TH' EARTH?
I WON'T LIE TO YOU, SAM.
IT WAS MY IDEA.


BEHOLD, BRETHREN!
THE FIREFORM TERRAN--SHE THE CAUSE OF TREMORS WAS!
WEAPONEERS, FORWARD! THE FEMALE, INCINERATE!

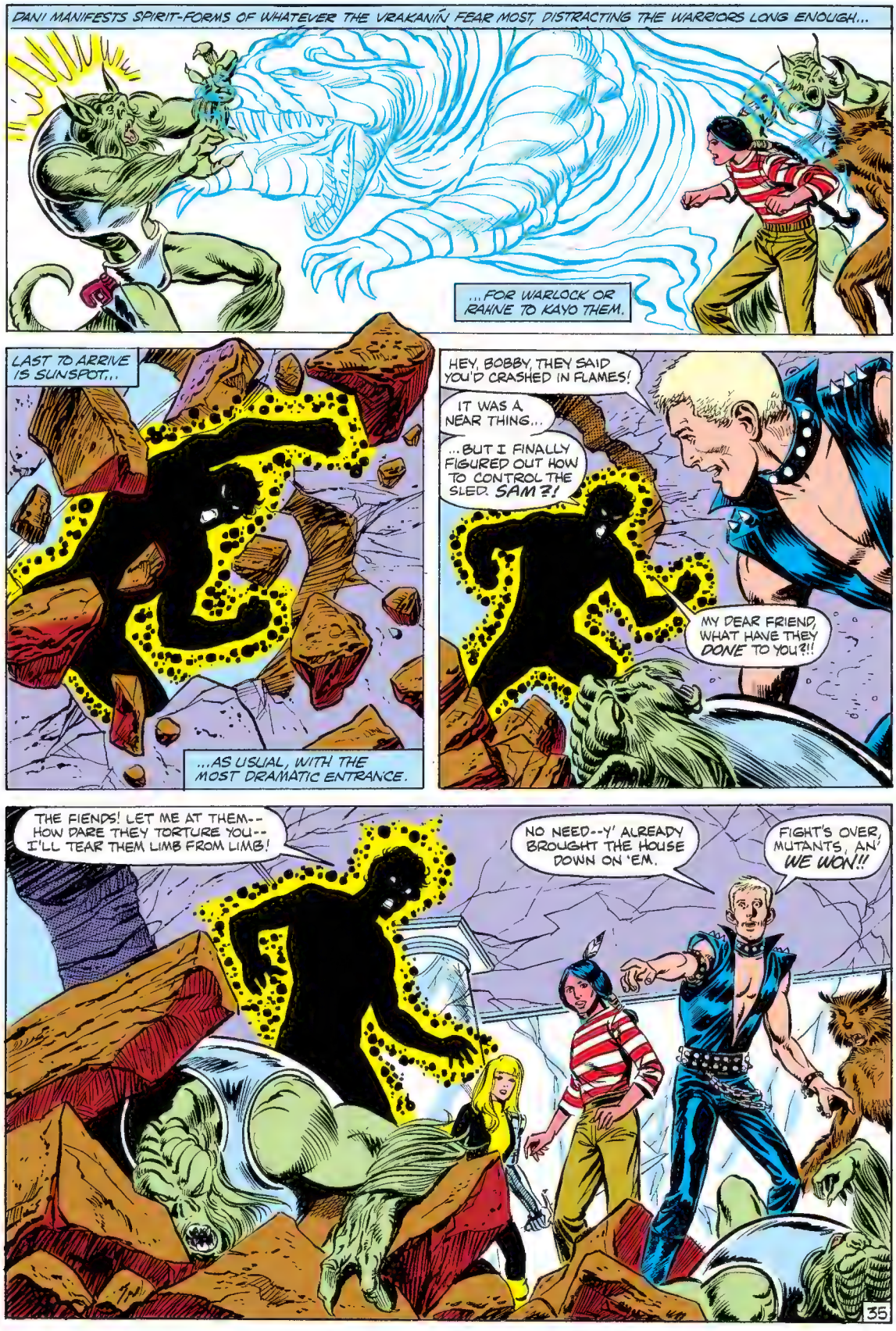

CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT, FUZZ-FACE!
MY SOULSWORD WON'T DO THESE CRITTERS ANY HARM...


...BUT THEY DON'T KNOW THAT!
INDEED, TO THE VRAKANIN...
...IT SEEMS AS IF ILLYANA'S JUST CUT HIM IN TWO.

PRECIOUS SECONDS PASS BEFORE HE REALIZES--TO HIS ASTONISHMENT AND MOST UNWARRIOR-LIKE RELIEF--THAT HE ISN'T DEAD, ISN'T BLEEDING, ISN'T EVEN HURT!

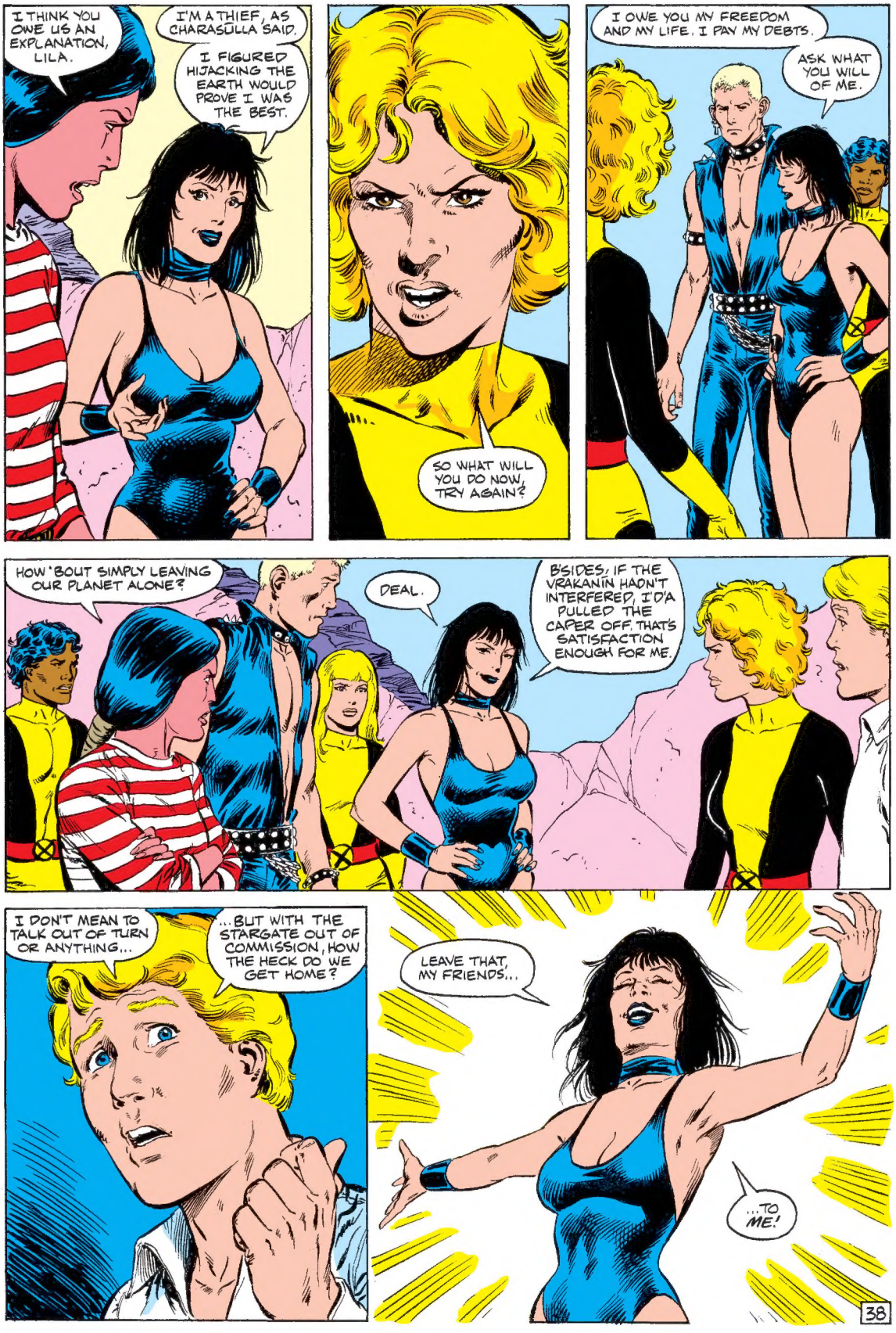
BY THEN, HOWEVER, DOUG RAMSEY'S MADE HIS MOVE.
HE'S GOING DOWN, ILLYANA!
GRAB HIS GUN!

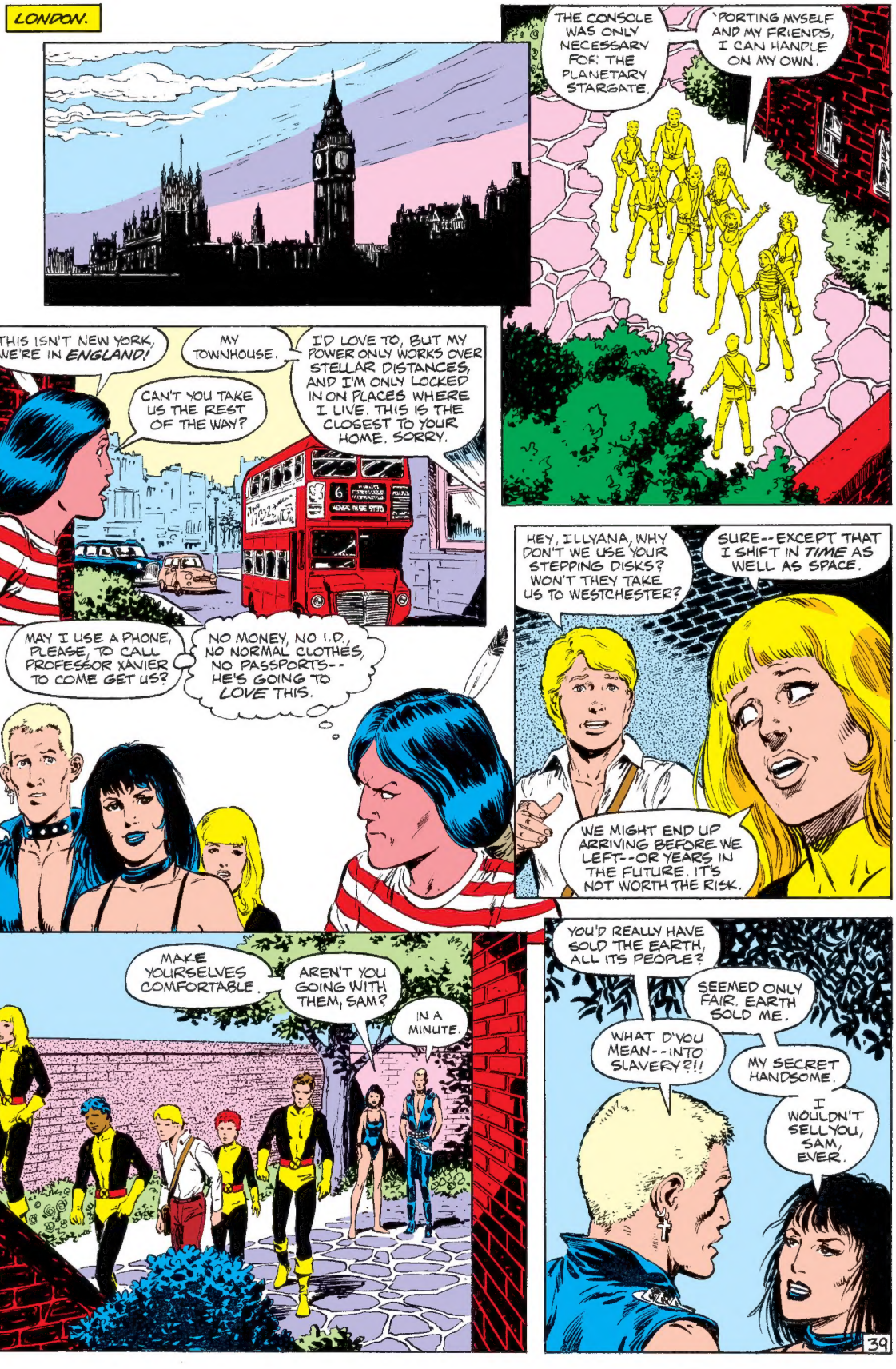
I HAVE IT, DOUG--OUR ALIEN'S TAKEN HIS LAST PELT!
ZARK
SHE--SHOT HIM! WHAT AM I DOING HERE?!
I DON'T HAVE ANY FANCY POWERS, LIKE THE OTHERS--I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO FIGHT THE WAY THEY DO--I COULD GET KILLED!
DOUG LOOKS SO PALE.
HE'S TERRIFIED--BUT HE ISN'T RUNNING, HE'S DOING HIS BEST TO HELP!
HE HAS MORE COURAGE THAN HE KNOWS.
JOIN THE PARTY, SAM?
YOU ARE SAM GUTHRIE, AREN'T YOU?
CUTE, ILLYANA.
I THINK YOU ARE. VERY. YUM!
FREE TH' OTHERS!
AH'LL NEVER LIVE THIS DOWN, NOT IN A MILLION YEARS!
WHAT'D AH DO T' DESERVE IT, LORD, WHERE DID AH GO WRONG?!
PICK A SPARRING PARTNER, PEOPLE, AND DECK 'EM FAST! WE'VE GOT TO CLOBBER THIS MAIN FORCE BEFORE THEY CAN SUMMON REENFORCEMENTS!
AND THE MUTANTS PROCEED TO DO PRECISELY THAT...

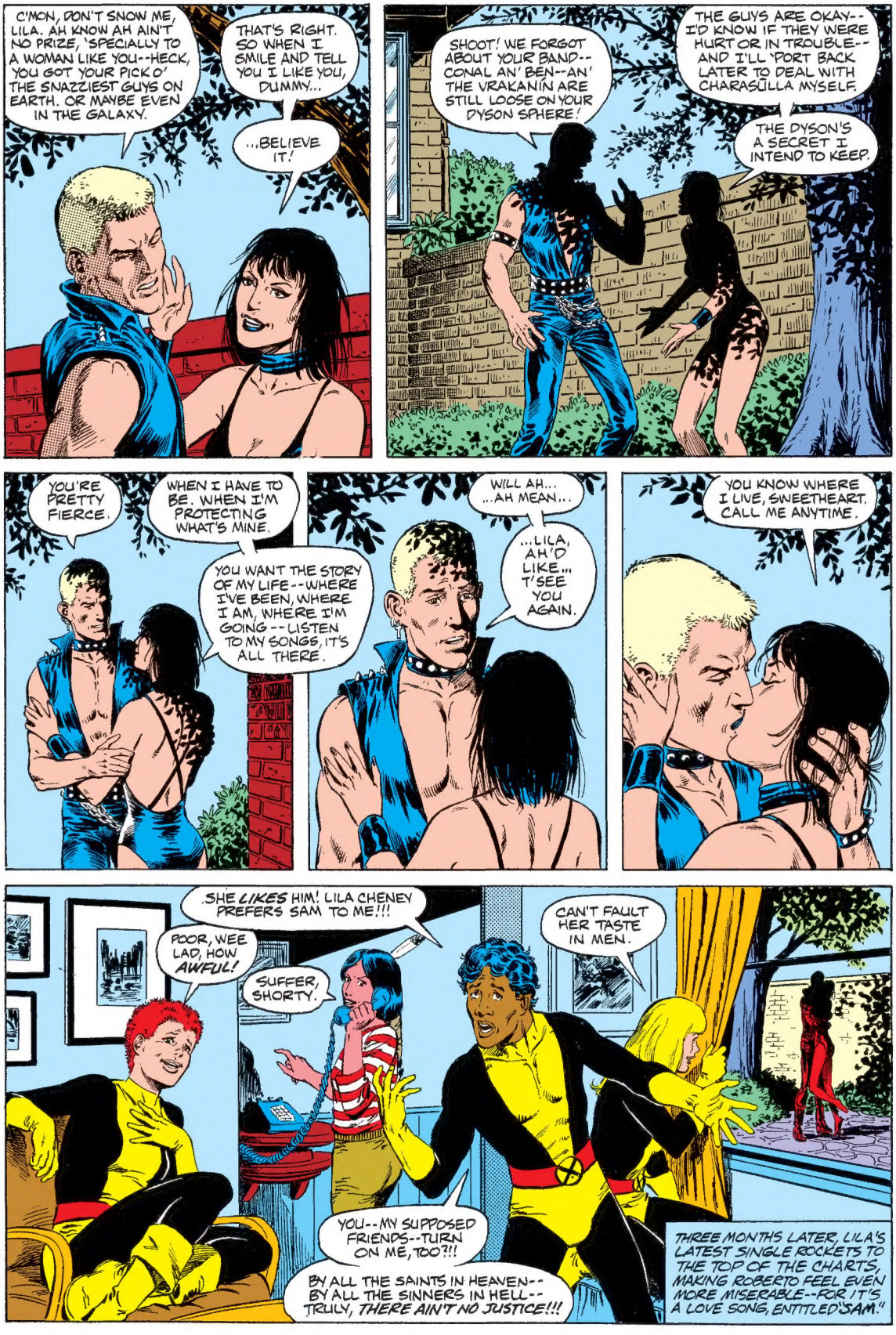

DANI MANIFESTS SPIRIT-FORMS OF WHATEVER THE VRAKANIN FEAR MOST, DISTRACTING THE WARRIORS LONG ENOUGH...
...FOR WARLOCK OR RAHNE TO KAYO THEM.
LAST TO ARRIVE IS SUNSPOT...
...AS USUAL, WITH THE MOST DRAMATIC ENTRANCE.
HEY, BOBBY, THEY SAID YOU'D CRASHED IN FLAMES!
IT WAS A NEAR THING...
...BUT I FINALLY FIGURED OUT HOW TO CONTROL THE SLED. SAM?!
MY DEAR FRIEND, WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU?!!
THE FIENDS! LET ME AT THEM-- HOW DARE THEY TORTURE YOU-- I'LL TEAR THEM LIMB FROM LIMB!
NO NEED--Y' ALREADY BROUGHT THE HOUSE DOWN ON 'EM.
FIGHT'S OVER, MUTANTS, AN' WE WON!!

THIS BATTLE, PERHAPS, SAM, BUT IN THE PROCESS YOU'VE DOOMED YOUR WORLD!
ARE YOU MAKING THREATS, THIEF?!
NO, BUT SEE THE WALLS GLOWING AROUND US?
WHEN YOU DESTROYED THE STARGATE CONSOLE, AMARA, YOU TRIGGERED ITS SELF-DESTRUCT CIRCUITS. INSTEAD OF TELEPORTING THE EARTH, MY WEB WILL DISINTEGRATE IT!
CAN'T'CHA STOP THE PROCESS, LILA?!
I DON'T KNOW HOW!
I'M NOT NATIVE TO THIS PLACE. I DISCOVERED HOW TO MAKE THINGS WORK HERE--THROUGH CAUSE AND EFFECT, TRIAL AND ERROR--BUT I NEVER LEARNED WHY.
TYPICAL GRAVE-ROBBER MENTALITY.
HEY, DANI, THESE PICTOGRAPHS MATCH THE ONES I SAW OUTSIDE.
I'M BEGINNING TO SENSE THE PATTERNS.
YOU KNOW WHAT ALL THIS MEANS, THEN?
GETTING THERE, ANYWAY, DANI.
HOW LONG'LL IT TAKE?
NO WAY OF TELLING. HOW LONG'VE I GOT?
THE ROOM'S GETTING BRIGHTER BY THE SECOND. I SUGGEST YOU HURRY.
LINGUISTIC STRUCTURE'S PRETTY BASIC...
THE MORE SOPHISTICATED THE TECHNOLOGY ON THE SPHERE, THE SIMPLER I FOUND IT TO OPERATE.
MAKES SENSE--UH-OH! THERE'S A BIT MISSING WHERE THE WALL COLLAPSED.

CAN YOU FIGURE IT OUT?
I'M DOING MY BEST, SAM!
DO BETTER!!
SO BRIGHT--LIKE BEING IN THE HEART OF A STAR!
MOTHER--FATHER--NEVER TO SEE YOU AGAIN, OR TELL YOU BOTH HOW MUCH I LOVE YOU!
MY STEPPING DISKS COULD 'PORT ME HOME...
...BUT WHO WOULD I SAVE--KITTY, MY BROTHER PETER, FRIENDS, PARENTS--HOW MANY?!!
THIS FEELS RIGHT. MAYBE I HAVE THE ANSWER!
BUT I NEED A LITTLE MORE TIME TO BE CERTAIN!
WE'RE OUT OF TIME!
HIT THE SWITCH, DOUG--YOU CAN'T MAKE THINGS ANY WORSE THAN THEY ALREADY ARE!
I SURE HOPE THOSE DON'T QUALIFY...
...AS FAMOUS LAST WORDS.
KLATCH!
THE ROOM--THE LIGHT--IT'S BACK T' NORMAL!
YOU DID GOOD, DOUG. WE'RE OBLIGED.
NOTHING LIKE EARNING YOUR SPURS THE HARD WAY, SPORT.
YEAH. IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF...
...I AM IMPRESSED.


I THINK YOU OWE US AN EXPLANATION, LILA.
I'M A THIEF, AS CHARASULLA SAID.
I FIGURED HIJACKING THE EARTH WOULD PROVE I WAS THE BEST.
SO WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW, TRY AGAIN?
I OWE YOU MY FREEDOM AND MY LIFE. I PAY MY DEBTS.
ASK WHAT YOU WILL OF ME.
HOW 'BOUT SIMPLY LEAVING OUR PLANET ALONE?
DEAL.
B'SIDES, IF THE VRAKANIN HADN'T INTERFERED, I'D'A PULLED THE CAPER OFF. THAT'S SATISFACTION ENOUGH FOR ME.
I DON'T MEAN TO TALK OUT OF TURN OR ANYTHING...
...BUT WITH THE STARGATE OUT OF COMMISSION, HOW THE HECK DO WE GET HOME?
LEAVE THAT, MY FRIENDS...
...TO ME!


LONDON.
THE CONSOLE WAS ONLY NECESSARY FOR THE PLANETARY STARGATE.
TRANSPORTING MYSELF AND MY FRIENDS, I CAN HANDLE ON MY OWN.
THIS ISN'T NEW YORK, WE'RE IN ENGLAND!
MY TOWNHOUSE.
I'D LOVE TO, BUT MY POWER ONLY WORKS OVER STELLAR DISTANCES, AND I'M ONLY LOCKED IN ON PLACES WHERE I LIVE. THIS IS THE CLOSEST TO YOUR HOME. SORRY.
CAN'T YOU TAKE US THE REST OF THE WAY?
HEY, ILLYANA, WHY DON'T WE USE YOUR STEPPING DISKS? WON'T THEY TAKE US TO WESTCHESTER?
SURE--EXCEPT THAT I SHIFT IN TIME AS WELL AS SPACE.
MAY I USE A PHONE, PLEASE, TO CALL PROFESSOR XAVIER TO COME GET US?
NO MONEY, NO I.D., NO NORMAL CLOTHES, NO PASSPORTS-- HE'S GOING TO LOVE THIS.
WE MIGHT END UP ARRIVING BEFORE WE LEFT--OR YEARS IN THE FUTURE. IT'S NOT WORTH THE RISK.
MAKE YOURSELVES COMFORTABLE.
AREN'T YOU GOING WITH THEM, SAM?
IN A MINUTE.
YOU'D REALLY HAVE SOLD THE EARTH, ALL ITS PEOPLE?
SEEMED ONLY FAIR. EARTH SOLD ME.
WHAT D'YOU MEAN--INTO SLAVERY?!!
MY SECRET HANDSOME.
I WOULDN'T SELL YOU, SAM, EVER.


C'MON, DON'T SNOW ME, LILA. AH KNOW AH AIN'T NO PRIZE, 'SPECIALLY TO A WOMAN LIKE YOU--HECK, YOU GOT YOUR PICK O' THE SNAZZIEST GUYS ON EARTH. OR MAYBE EVEN IN THE GALAXY.
THAT'S RIGHT. SO WHEN I SMILE AND TELL YOU I LIKE YOU, DUMMY...
...BELIEVE IT!
SHOOT! WE FORGOT ABOUT YOUR BAND--CONAL AN' BEN--AN' THE VRAKANIN ARE STILL LOOSE ON YOUR DYSON SPHERE!
THE GUYS ARE OKAY--I'D KNOW IF THEY WERE HURT OR IN TROUBLE--AND I'LL 'PORT BACK LATER TO DEAL WITH CHARASULLA MYSELF.
THE DYSON'S A SECRET I INTEND TO KEEP.
YOU'RE PRETTY FIERCE.
WHEN I HAVE TO BE. WHEN I'M PROTECTING WHAT'S MINE.
YOU WANT THE STORY OF MY LIFE--WHERE I'VE BEEN, WHERE I AM, WHERE I'M GOING--LISTEN TO MY SONGS, IT'S ALL THERE.
WILL AH... ...AH MEAN...
...LILA, AH'D LIKE... T'SEE YOU AGAIN.
YOU KNOW WHERE I LIVE, SWEETHEART. CALL ME ANYTIME.
SHE LIKES HIM! LILA CHENEY PREFERS SAM TO ME!!!
POOR, WEE LAD, HOW AWFUL!
SUFFER, SHORTY.
CAN'T FAULT HER TASTE IN MEN.
YOU--MY SUPPOSED FRIENDS--TURN ON ME, TOO?!!
BY ALL THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN--BY ALL THE SINNERS IN HELL--TRULY, THERE AIN'T NO JUSTICE!!!
THREE MONTHS LATER, LILA'S LATEST SINGLE ROCKETS TO THE TOP OF THE CHARTS, MAKING ROBERTO FEEL EVEN MORE MISERABLE--FOR IT'S A LOVE SONG, ENTITLED "SAM."

Digitized by

Syl3nt Bob and PhD

He's a gonna be OKAY!

I think...